

LIVING THE GOOD NEWS **in the Gospel of Luke**

**Eight motivational studies for
reaching out to others**

— with introduction

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These studies can be used for private study and meditation or for group study and discussion.

Guidelines for group study

1. Pastor invites members at a service or services to volunteer to hold this series of Bible studies in their home, inviting up to ten more people to share these studies with them.
2. Those invited are encouraged to invite others to come and join in with them.
3. If a particular group gets too large (more than a dozen), one of the group should volunteer to start another group so that other can always be invited to join. This is how the Kingdom of God grows.
4. Of course, you want ‘insiders’ (i.e., congregation members) to participate in this. But you will also want to give the opportunity to participate to any friends and acquaintances who are ‘outsiders’ (non-members).
5. At the end of a certain period (say, 12 weeks), a potluck supper could be arranged with all participants attending as a grand finale—not only to share insights, seek explanations from the pastor on unanswered questions, but also to celebrate the Kingdom.

This study may be duplicated for local use.

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Introduction to the Gospel of Luke and Study 1

Before we study the message the Gospel of Luke has for us in reaching out to others, it is important to know something about who wrote it and why. It also helps to know to whom it was originally addressed and what final outcome was expected from his readers. Answers to these questions will help us also to understand how *we* fit into the great family of the people of God, as members of God's Kingdom into which Jesus has called us. These answers will help us to see our mission as God's people.

Who is the author?

The author was certainly well educated, for he writes in a fluent Hellenistic style, after the manner of Greek historians. He was also well acquainted with the Old Testament scriptures in the Greek translation (the Septuagint) and familiar with Jewish traditions. However, his inadequate knowledge of Palestinian geography would indicate he was not a native of Palestine. Although the Gospel would not have been titled the "Gospel of Luke" originally, the church has always from earliest times recognized the author as Luke, the person who is referred to in Philemon 24 as Paul's "fellow-worker," and in 2 Timothy 4:11 as the only one who was with Paul during his final days in Rome. In Colossians 4:14 he is called "Luke the beloved physician" who, together with Paul and other companions, sent greetings to the church at Colossae. An ancient Greek Prologue to the Gospel, written at the end of the second century AD, says that "Luke was a Syrian of Antioch, by profession a physician, the disciple of the apostles, and later a follower of Paul until his martyrdom."

Why was it written?

Luke gives a reason at the beginning of his Gospel. **Read Luke 1:1-4.** There he acknowledges that "many" have already written about the teaching and mission of

Jesus as this was passed down from eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. So why does Luke write another account? He tells us that having investigated everything "accurately" from the first, he wished to write "in order, point by point" so that his reader might know the "certainty" of what he had been taught so that he would feel secure in it (1:3-4).

The real meaning of this statement becomes clear as we examine Luke's writings as a whole. In order to understand his purpose we need to look also at his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. When we put this together with the Gospel, we can see how Luke has set out a continuing story. In the Gospel everything focuses towards Jerusalem as the centre from which the message of Jesus is to go out into the world. In Acts, the risen Jesus sends the disciples out as witnesses "into all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). That is then illustrated primarily in Paul's activities right up to the time Paul is still preaching in Rome around 61 AD, even while under house arrest there (Acts 28:30). Luke's two volumes thus give the whole sweep of the spread of the Gospel from Galilee to Jerusalem and from there to all the lands around the Mediterranean and on to Rome as the centre of the whole Roman Empire.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus concentrates on bringing the Good News to the people of Israel in fulfilment of God's promises

to them, and on preparing his disciples for their mission. Nevertheless, every now and then Luke will emphasize that the Good News is also for all nations. This is highlighted in old Simeon's utterance when the infant Jesus is presented at the temple: "My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of *all peoples, a light for revelation to the nations*, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32). Luke expands the quotation of Isaiah 40:3 said in regard to John the Baptist in Matthew 3:3, to include the words of Isaiah 40:5: "and *all flesh* shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). Luke places Jesus' preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth virtually at the beginning of his ministry to emphasize that Jesus' purpose is in accordance with Isaiah 61:1-3 and 58:6. When that message and Jesus' prophetic role are rejected, Jesus points the people of Nazareth to examples of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha being sent by God to outsiders beyond the borders of Israel (Luke 4:16-30; cf. Matthew 13:53-58). The implication is clear that even if it is rejected by those to whom it was originally sent, the Good News to the afflicted would go to, and was also meant for, all nations. This same message is given again in Luke 13:22-30 where they will see people coming from the four corners of the earth to celebrate in the Kingdom of God. In Luke's version of the messianic banquet parable (14:15-24; cf. Matt 22:1-14), the master sends his servant out a second time to bring in people "from the highways and hedges," that is, those outside of Israel. The Gospel ends on a universal note when the risen Jesus explains to his disciples that his death and resurrection was so "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name *to all nations*, beginning from Jerusalem" (24:46-48).

With this emphasis in mind, Luke wanted to show that Christianity had a positive stance toward Rome and its people and that it was a politically harmless, socially conscious, love-motivated faith founded on the message and ministry of Jesus Christ. In Jesus God had fulfilled his promises to Israel and now extended these blessings to all nations. For this reason Jesus had exemplified Israel's role and had trained his followers to carry out that role of being faithful witnesses to the nations.

Luke wished to demonstrate, therefore, that Christianity was really a branch of Judaism, because Judaism had been officially recognized as a *bona fide* religion in the Empire with its headquarters in Jerusalem. Consequently, Luke connects Jesus to Jerusalem as often as he can. Jesus, 40 days old, is presented in the temple in Jerusalem (2:22); at age twelve he is again found in the temple (2:42-46); his Galilean ministry is shortened (4:14-9:50), while his journey to Jerusalem is expanded (9:51-19:27). This is followed by his Jerusalem ministry (19:28-21:38) and his suffering, death and resurrection there (22:1-24:53). Significantly, Jesus' final words to his disciples in the Gospel are to tell them to stay in Jerusalem until they "are clothed with power from on high" (24:49). It is from Jerusalem, as Luke shows in Acts, that the Good News goes out into the world of his time, reaching even to Rome, the centre of the Mediterranean world.

The constant message that no-one is deemed unworthy, no-one is to be regarded as marginal, or outcaste, or inferior, that all people are acceptable in God's sight, points in one direction: This Gospel has been written primarily for Gentiles. Luke wanted to say emphatically that when God sent his son Jesus Christ to seek and to save the lost, that included also the Gentiles.

To whom is it addressed?

Luke addressed his Gospel to “most excellent Theophilus,” which may be a generic name to mean any person who seeks to be a “friend of God” (*theophilos*). The work is certainly directed towards Greek-speaking Gentiles who know something of the story of Jesus and are acquainted to some degree with the Old Testament prophetic writings.

The message of Jesus had first been proclaimed to Jews in a Jewish context against the background of Jewish tradition. The first Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew, had been written for Jewish Christians. The early church was unanimous in its conviction that this Gospel had early circulated in an original Hebrew version which was later translated into Greek. The Hebrew version continued to be used by those Jewish Christians in the eastern Diaspora, while the Greek version circulated around the Mediterranean lands initially among Greek-speaking Jewish Christians and early Gentile converts. However, because Matthew’s Gospel was addressed

primarily to Jewish Christians, with its references to Jewish law and practices, Gentile Christians could gain the impression that they were only second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God. Luke sought to correct that impression by writing his Gospel specifically for Gentile Christians to give them the *certainty* (Luke 1:4) that the Good News was also addressed to them. This is essentially what was implied by that second-century Greek Prologue to Luke’s Gospel: “He [Luke] made very clear in the prologue that other (gospels) had been written before him but that it was necessary to set forth for Gentile converts the accurate account of the (new) dispensation that they might not be distracted by Jewish fables or deceived by heretical and foolish fantasies, and so miss the truth itself.”

Activity

Take a look at Luke 1:1-4 and some of the other passages mentioned above. Discuss the implications of Luke’s purpose for sharing the Good News with others.

Study 1

Calling the first disciples

Luke 5:1-11

In Luke's narrative so far, Jesus' baptism has taken place at which the voice from heaven has acknowledged him as "my beloved Son" (3:21-22). Luke has traced this sonship in a genealogy back to Adam, the son of God, to emphasize that Jesus as God's Son is the true representative of humanity (3:22-28). As such, he has then been tested for forty days in the wilderness, as Israel was for forty years. While Israel had failed similar tests (cf. Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 8:2-5), Jesus proved to be a true Son of God (4:1-15). Having passed the test, Jesus is then ready to begin his ministry.

To introduce that ministry Luke has placed Jesus' preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth early (cf. Matthew 13:53-58 where it comes after Jesus has done considerable preaching, teaching, and healing). Luke has done this to emphasize both the central message of Jesus and the response to it. The central message is that Jesus has come as God's Anointed One to bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God for the afflicted, in which there is liberation and healing, in fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6. When the response is unbelief, Jesus' message to them is that the Good News will go to outsiders, just as the great prophets Elijah and Elisha had given help and healing to those outside Israel (4:16-30). However, there are many who do seek Jesus and are amazed at his word and his healings. Even demonic forces which are cast out acknowledge Jesus as "the Holy One of God," "Son of God" (4:31-44).

This is the landscape for the calling of the first disciples and is the basis on which we too are called to follow. But keep in mind as you study this reading that there is much more to this than just choosing disciples. The story really tells us something of what discipleship is all about. Consider what implications for understanding discipleship are already there in the stories leading up to this call.

Read Luke 5:1-11

1. Compare Luke's version with the account in Matthew 4:18-22; 13:1-2. What differences do you notice in Luke's account? Why?
2. Compare this with John 21:1-11. How do these stories differ? What is the basic message in each?
3. Vv. 4-5: Considering that Luke has the whole meaning and experience of discipleship in mind here, what symbolic significance do you see in Peter's protest? In this connection, discuss the meaning of Jesus' parables in Luke 13:18-21.
4. Vv. 6-7: What do these verses remind us about discipleship and faith?
5. Vv. 8-9: Why did Simon Peter say he was a sinful man instead of rejoicing at the good fortune and showing gratitude? Consider these possibilities: awe at Jesus' mighty power, lack of faith, feeling of unworthiness. What are disciples made of, anyway? Cf. Luke 5:27-28.
6. Vv. 9-10a: Although Simon Peter has been singled out in this story, he is not alone—he has partners. What does this say about discipleship? Theirs and ours?

- 7 V. 10b reads literally: “Jesus said to Simon, ‘Fear not, from now on you shall be one who catches people alive.’” Keep in mind that fishing was by gathering in a net rather than by line and hook. Cf. Matthew 13:47-50. So the emphasis is on *gathering* into the Kingdom. Luke’s account of this saying is slightly different from that in Matthew 4:21. Jesus used this phrase because of the promise in Jeremiah 16:15-16 that after the Exile God in his compassion would gather them back to him. Look at that passage in its context and compare it with Isaiah 49:5-6 and 54:7-8 (spoken near the end of the Exile).
- 8 “Fear not,” a favourite saying of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. Cf. Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32. Compare these with Isaiah 35:4; 40:9; 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2; 51:7; 54:4. What do all these say about discipleship—Peter’s and ours?

What a privilege it is to share the Good News!

Study 2

Reaching out to heal

Luke 5:12-26

After calling the first disciples, Luke gives this account of Jesus performing two healing miracles before calling another to be a disciple, Levi (Matthew) the tax collector. In the First Gospel, Matthew has given descriptions of a series of miracles in Matthew 8-9 in order to emphasize that the healing and restoration of Israel is the sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Luke spreads the telling of these miracles throughout his Gospel, sometimes including others to emphasize that Jesus has been empowered to offer God's compassion and healing to people in all different walks of life. Here he shows how Jesus reaches out particularly to those despised and rejected like the man with leprosy and the helpless and seemingly hopeless like the person who was paralyzed.

The usual Greek word in the Gospels for healing is *therapeuein*, "to serve, care for, restore, heal." It is from this verb that we get our words, "therapy," "therapeutic." Luke uses this word fourteen times. The more common verb used in classical Greek for physical healing is *iasthai*. Luke, who is called *iatros* ("physician") in Colossians 4:14, uses this word more often than the others (Luke—11 times; Matthew—4 times; Mark—once) but seems to make no distinction between the two. He sometimes has *iasthai* when the parallel in Matthew has *therapeuein*. The reason why *therapeuein* is usually preferred by the Gospel writers is because it

emphasizes not only physical healing but spiritual healing as well. The physical and spiritual are never separated. Luke uses this verb in v.15.

1. You will note that Luke is very sensitive about putting labels on people. Whereas Mathew.8:2 and Mark 1:40 both refer to a "leper," Luke (v. 12) prefers "a man full of leprosy." Similarly, Matthew 9:2 and Mark 2:3 both have "paralytic," whereas Luke 5:18 has "a person who was paralyzed." Luke wishes to distinguish between the person and the disease. What can we learn from this?

Healing the man with leprosy

Read Luke 5:12-16

2. To understand this person's plight and the requirements set down in the priestly law for his cleansing, read particularly Leviticus 13:45-46 and 14:4-10. Cf. Numbers 5:2-4; 2 Kings 7:3-9. What impressions do you have?
3. Discuss sickness and disease today. Do we still find attitudes of isolation and rejection? Do we marginalize people?
4. Discuss what reasons would motivate you to reach out to people in situations like this.
5. Look at v. 13. What does Jesus' action teach us?
6. What healing can we do?

7. What does Jesus teach us about reaching out to others who are sick, lonely, or feel rejected in v. 16?
8. Think of someone you know who is sick or lonely or may feel isolated. Discuss what you can do to bring healing.

Healing the paralyzed man

Read Luke 5:17-26.

9. Verse 17 tells us that “the power of the Lord was with him to heal.” What is meant by this? Look at Luke 4:14,36; 6:19; 8:46; 21:27; 22:69. What about us? Look at Luke 9:1; 24:49.
10. In v. 19, note the eagerness and persistence of the friends of the man with paralysis: they climb on the roof, remove the tiles, let the man in the bed down in front of Jesus. Whose faith leads Jesus to heal the man? See v. 20. What can we draw from this?
11. “Your sins are forgiven.” With these words Jesus is declaring God’s forgiveness by the authority given him by the Father. Why is this connected with healing? Discuss this in connection with Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18 at the beginning of his ministry. Cf. Isaiah 40:1-2; 43:25; 44:22. Restoration and forgiveness are all part of the Good

News of the Kingdom of God. What implications does that have for us? See Luke 11:4; 17:3-4; 23:34.

12. The Pharisees say only God can forgive sins, but can *we* tell someone their sins are forgiven? Cf. Matthew 18:18-20; John 20:22-23. *Yet how can our declaration of forgiveness bring healing?*

“But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” Jesus calls himself “Son of man” here because it is a collective term for the faithful. Jesus is the true representative of God’s faithful people. He is God’s Righteous One, the Servant, who makes many to be accounted righteous (Isaiah 53:11). He is “Son of man” who represents “the holy ones of the Most High” who “receive the Kingdom” (Daniel 7:13,18,22,27). He represents the members of the Kingdom to whom is given authority on earth to forgive sins. See how this is stated in Matthew 9:6-8.

13. Discuss how God’s forgiveness brings healing into your life, and how you can be God’s instrument in the lives of others.

Remember! Reaching out to the sick, the helpless, the alienated is not a law. Just let the power of the Lord work through you to heal!

Study 3

Learning to love the Kingdom way

Luke 6:20-49

This Sermon on the Plain, as it is called, is a vital learning experience for Kingdom members, and so Jesus prepared himself for it in the way all disciples prepare for any important event. Jesus went to a quiet spot on a mountain and spent the time in prayer to God (v. 12). The next day he chose the twelve apostles and then came down with them to a level place and there preached to a great crowd of disciples and people from all over the country (vv. 17-19). Yet this Sermon is addressed primarily to his disciples (v. 20); Jesus is setting down the spiritual and moral foundation for them to follow in his steps. They are to become like him as children of the heavenly Father, members of the Kingdom of God.

This Sermon appears to be a shortened version of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. But it leaves out many sections which were more meaningful for Jewish Christians, such as the discussion of Jewish law, or uses them elsewhere. Luke wants to focus on those teachings of Jesus which are more relevant to Gentiles and to make the message as pointed as possible. These aspects are very relevant to us as present-day Kingdom members as we seek to exemplify our heavenly Father in our relations with others.

Jesus had already stated what his mission was in his inaugural sermon in Luke 4:17-21 with the quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. It is to reach out with the Good News of God's love and compassion to the afflicted, the prisoners,

the blind and the oppressed. He will continue this through his disciples, then and now, through those who *listen* to him (cf. 6:18, 27, 47).

While the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 emphasize the spiritual blessings, Luke's are strongly sociological. Luke knows that in Jesus' teaching both the spiritual and the sociological are integrally connected, yet for his audience it is the real social concerns of poverty, hunger, grief, hatred, exclusion, reviling which need to be addressed. Spirituality can never be separated from social action and is its motivating force. Luke draws in corresponding woes (not found in Matthew) to contrast with the blessings. This is to emphasize Kingdom concern and action for the afflicted over against common attitudes found in society of unconcern in terms of self-centred indifference, greed, indulgence, and feeding on flattery.

The overall attitude of a Kingdom member is love and mercy—a love that imitates God's love for us. Consequently, it is a love which reaches beyond the animosity, resentment, hate, ridicule, abuse shown to us to the person(s) behind all these hurtful attitudes and actions. Behind these kinds of attitudes is usually a person who is also hurting, lost, or misguided. Love does not pass judgment or condemn. Instead it reaches out in compassion, forgiveness, and understanding. Love is very vulnerable, but it is the only ultimate power to

transform lives for good. Kingdom members recognize their own vulnerability and are conscious that without God's love being like that they would be lost. Like a fruitful tree, they draw their life-giving source from the love of God in Christ. They build upon that foundation, and so stand firm against counter-forces to act in love.

Blessings and Woes

Read Luke 6:20-26.

1. The first four verses are proclamations of God's blessings on you. How do you feel?
2. "Yours is the Kingdom of God." What does this mean to you?
3. Are these blessings (vv. 20-23) for this life or for a future after-life? Note that "in heaven" in v. 23 is the pious Jewish way of saying "in the presence of God" (Compare Luke 6:20 with Matthew 5:3; and Luke 6:23 with Matthew 5:12). Picture yourself as one of the disciples sitting at the feet of Jesus as he proclaims these blessings and woes to you. How would you understand them? How would you interpret them for you personally? Cf. Isaiah 65:13-14.

Loving enemies, reaching out selflessly

Read Luke 6:27-36.

4. Share with each other some of the experiences you have had with people who hate you or curse and abuse you. How have you reacted? Why do people act that way? How can we respond in each case in a way that shows we are "children of the Most High" (v. 35)?
5. Why would you stand there and let an abusive person hit you again, or let a thief take even your shirt (v. 29)?

6. Is giving to street beggars being merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful (vv. 30, 36)?
7. Jesus may have had these passages in mind: Exodus 22:25-26; Deuteronomy 24:10-17. Cf. Matthew 5:38-42. Or does he go further? What is one's motivation?
8. In vv. 32-36 Jesus speaks about two different kinds of love. Both are reflected love but what is the difference? See also 2 Corinthians 3:16-18.

Being non-judgmental, forgiving, sharing

Read Luke 6:37-42.

9. Is it judging when you discriminate against people of another race, or religion, or social status?
10. Is it ever okay to judge or condemn?
11. Where does forgiveness and giving come into it?
12. Discuss the point of Jesus' carpenter-shop hyperbole (vv. 41-42).

Being fruitful

Read Luke 6:43-49.

13. What is the point Jesus wants us to understand in the metaphors of a tree and a treasure? Cf. Psalm 1:1-4; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Isaiah 61:3; Genesis 3:18; Isaiah 7:23-25.
14. What does it mean for you to build on a rock (vv.46-49)?
15. So now what does it really mean to be a disciple, a Kingdom member? Summarize Jesus' message to you.
Remember, being a Kingdom member is a gift of Grace. Just let the love of God flow through you!

Study 4

Being the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

One needs to become acquainted with the characters in this well-known story. There are five of them: a lawyer, a priest, a Levite, a Samaritan, and a man who fell among robbers.

A lawyer (Read vv. 25-29)

The term “lawyer” (more often referred to as “scribe”) has overtones of “legalist.” These scribes were often associated with the party of the Pharisees (see Luke 11:42-54). This lawyer has spoken up with the intent of trying to trap Jesus in rabbinic disputes over matters of the law, particularly regarding what laws one must keep to gain eternal life. Jesus throws the question back to him: “What is written in the law?” You will notice that the lawyer then gives an answer which is very similar to how Jesus has summarized the commandments in Matthew 22:33-40. So the lawyer shows he has good *head* knowledge; all he has to do now is *live* it. But he had tried to draw Jesus into a legal dispute, a head game, but failed. So he tries again with another point of dispute: “Who *is* my neighbour?” The real question behind this was: “Who am I required to love?” It was another head game. But Jesus gives a reply in this story which shows that the answer has to come from the heart. Of course, there were legal debates at this time over this very question. Leviticus 19:18 implied that one’s neighbours were fellow-Israelites (“sons of your own people”), yet Leviticus 19:33-34 extended that favour also to “sojourners,” that is, non-Israelites living

among them. However, the Pharisees were very concerned that associations with non-Israelites had to be restricted because of their fear of contamination of belief, ritual purity and practice, as well as collaboration with the “enemy” (cf. Matthew 5:43; see also Sirach (Apoc). 12:1-7).

1. Before we go further into this, let us be clear as to what the issues are that separate us from others. Is it ethnic background, colour, doctrines, traditions, customs, status? Discuss these issues. How do we deal with them? With the head or the heart? Or both? Do we isolate ourselves from others for fear of contamination?

A priest (Read vv. 30-32)

In order to function as a priest, to officiate at the twice-daily sacrifices in the temple and other cultic worship, the priest had to maintain a state of strict ritual purity. As a religious leader, he held a privileged status in Jewish society. Any form of defilement through contact with a corpse or blood or disease or with a non-Jew would render him unable to perform his temple duties. He would be humiliated in the eyes of his fellow-priests and forced to undergo a costly and time-consuming process of purification. For a priest even to approach within six feet of a dead person could render him defiled. Such a concern would not encourage him even to check whether the man was alive or not. So he passes by “on the other side.” In doing so, he had kept the law! He had

followed the rules of his religious system! Thus, he was a sincerely religious man. But his religion prevented him from acting in compassion.

2. What is true religion? Is it rituals and regulations? Take a look at Micah 6:6-8 and Hosea 6:6. How do you define 'religion' and 'spirituality' in the light of all this?

A Levite

He carried out minor functions in and for the temple, but he was not permitted to enter the holy place or offer sacrifices (cf Ezekial 44:10-14). So the rules for maintaining ritual purity were not as strict as for a priest. Yet it was still a factor, so he preferred to follow the example of the priest before him. Of course, this road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which wound through the Judean hills for 28 kms, was a lonely stretch, and fear of brigands who took advantage of unprotected travellers, may also have played a role in both the priest's and the Levite's actions. In such a case, self-interest would have been the motivating factor.

3. Can you think of occasions when your religiosity or self-interest has gotten in the way of your acting in compassion?

A Samaritan (Read vv. 33-35)

Even though the Samaritans had the same basic laws as the Jews, they were generally despised by the Judeans, classed with Philistines, Edomites (cf. Sirach (Apoc.) 50:25-26), and foreigners. One rabbi held that "he who eats the bread of Samaritans is like one who eats the flesh of swine" (m. Shebiith (Apoc.) 8:10). Cf. John 4:9; 8:25. The Samaritan religion was seen as impure, diluted by foreign influences. Relations between Jews and Samaritans were generally one of hostility. In Luke 9:51-54, Samaritans

would not receive Jesus into their village because he was headed for Jerusalem. Later, Luke reports the story of Jesus healing ten lepers (17:11-17) of which only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank God. In Acts, Luke reports on the success of the mission to Samaria (1:8; 8:1-14; 9:31; 15:3).

Although the victim likely would have been an Israelite, the Samaritan, whose religion was seen as inferior, acted in compassion, regardless of the cost to him. Yet he was bound by the same law, risked similar defilement, and was an easy target for the same brigands. The striking thing here is that those who claimed pure doctrine failed to act, while the one they accused of false belief was the one who reflected the compassion of God.

4. Where do we stand in this story? Which one of the four mentioned so far best reflects some of our attitudes and actions? Are we governed by rules, reason, or compassion? What really motivates us to be compassionate towards others?

The man who fell among robbers

What do we know about this man? Nothing, except that he was stripped, beaten and left half-dead. Jesus says nothing about his religion, his race, his social or economic status. He is simply a person in need. He could have been a rich man, a derelict, a priest or an atheist, but he was in need.

5. We have to ask ourselves: How selective are we in reaching out to others? Who is our neighbour in our world today?

And Jesus said: "Go and do likewise."

Remember: This is not a law. Just let the mercy and compassion of our loving God in Christ work through you.

Study 5

The invitation is for all: gathering into the Kingdom

Luke 14:1-24

In this chapter Luke brings together a number of sayings of Jesus given at a banquet or about banquets. You may recall that in Luke 5:29-39 Jesus taught at a banquet at the home of Matthew Levi. In 7:36-50 Jesus' feet were anointed by a woman as he dined in the house of a Pharisee. In 9:10-17 Jesus himself presided over a banquet for over 5,000. He was again invited to dine at the house of a Pharisee in 11:37-52. In 13:23-30 Jesus spoke of the heavenly banquet "where people will come from east and west, from north and south, and sit at table in the Kingdom of God." It is important to note that the background for all these banquets and feasts is always the idea of the Kingdom being likened to a banquet celebration.

This celebration was often referred to as the messianic banquet by Pharisees and Essenes alike, as the time when the expected Messiah would come and usher in the Kingdom. Note that in all of the above occasions Jesus was speaking about the Kingdom of God. This whole idea originated in the Old Testament. Near the end of the Babylonian Exile, a prophet announced that God was about to redeem his people and they were invited to a banquet to celebrate God's rule once again in their hearts and lives. It is into this Kingdom that we have been invited and invite others.

Read Isaiah 55:1-5 and then Isaiah 25:6-9

With this background in mind, **read Luke 14:1-6**. This meal takes place on the Sabbath, again at the invitation of a Pharisee. Jesus heals one of the invited guests, as he had done before on the Sabbath (see 6:1-11; 13:10-17).

1. Why does Jesus do this healing here? Why on the Sabbath? What does it imply about the Kingdom of God?

Read Luke 14:7-11.

The host has obviously invited an elitist group of lawyers and Pharisees (v. 3) to his dinner, men of power and prestige concerned about their status.

2. In this parable, what is Jesus implying about the Kingdom of God? What is the basis of honour and shame?

Read Luke 14:12-14. Cf. Luke 6:32-36; Matthew 5:46-48.

Jesus here contrasts four kinds of people who can return favours—friends, brothers, kinsmen, rich neighbours, with four kinds who cannot—poor, maimed, lame and blind (cf. v. 21; 7:22). While Luke emphasizes the socio-economic aspect here in the latter four for his Gentile readers, they had a more spiritual meaning in their Jewish context. They were the afflicted, oppressed, dispossessed and down-trodden who turned to God for help seeking spiritual healing and restoration in the Kingdom of God. Read Zephaniah 3:11-15; Isaiah 35:3-10; 42:18-19; 43:8-10; 60:21-61:3.

3. Keeping both of these concepts in mind, what is Jesus telling his host about the Kingdom of God?

Read Luke 14:15-24.

One of the guests, hearing Jesus mention the “resurrection of the righteous” (v. 14) and still thinking in Pharisaic terms, comments on the blessedness of being able to participate in the messianic banquet. He has failed to see that the Kingdom has already come in Jesus the Messiah. So Jesus tells this parable as a stiff warning to these religious leaders that rejection can be fatal. They will be shut out from that blessedness unless they change their attitudes.

The picture Jesus paints in vv. 16-17 must be seen against its middle-east background. A host would first invite guests to a dinner and after having received their acceptances would then plan the banquet specifically for the number who had accepted. Because of warm climate and no refrigeration, the food prepared would have to be eaten on that same day. So in accepting an invitation one made a firm commitment to be there. As soon as the banquet had been prepared, a servant would then call on all the guests to let them know it was time to come.

4. What do you think Jesus was really saying to them about the Kingdom? What about us today: do we fit into this picture?

In vv. 18-20 those first invited all make excuses why they cannot come. Jesus gives three examples, and all are equally meaningless and absurd. No-one buys a field before he has inspected it thoroughly, no-one makes such a huge investment in five yoke of oxen before testing them to see if they could pull together, nor could marriage be used as an

excuse. Every excuse is really a blatant insult, yet the group of guests Jesus was speaking to probably felt they had good excuses for not accepting Jesus’ invitation to the Kingdom.

5. Consider what Jesus has said in Matthew 6:31-34. Do you see a connection here to the Pharisees? To our society? To ourselves?

Now the servant is instructed to bring in those the host had been advised to invite in v. 13: “the poor and maimed and blind and lame” from the streets and lanes of the city. We know these are God’s people, but from the point of view of the Pharisaic guests they are the powerless, the ignorant, the blemished, the impure, the sinners of their community. However, the invitation now goes out even further. It is not limited to inhabitants of “the city,” that is, Israel. The servant is to bring in people from the “highways and hedges” outside the city, that is, the Gentile nations. The invitation is always a gracious invitation, but Jesus uses the word “compel” here. That does not mean that the servant was to use force. It simply meant that the meaning of this unexpected, generous invitation needed to be explained and its significance indicated to these “outsiders.”

6. What meaning does this story have for us today? Three different groups were invited to the banquet. Discuss who you think would fit into these categories today.
7. Who do you think was the servant in this parable? Who is that servant today?

As we reach out to others to bring them into God’s Kingdom, it is important to recall what Jesus has been telling us here about this Kingdom. In vv. 1-6 he

told us it is not about rules and regulations, but about love and compassion, healing and restoring. In vv. 7-11 he showed us that it is not about status or hierarchy or self-worth, but about service, humility and divine grace. In vv. 12-14, Jesus indicated that the Kingdom is not elitist but egalitarian, not for gain but for giving as God has given to us. In these last verses (15-24) Jesus has shown that the Kingdom is not the exclusive reward of a few, but God's gracious invitation reaching out to everyone. But there is an urgency to the Kingdom. It is here now. Isn't that worth sharing?

The Banquet is waiting.

Remember, just let the grace of God reach out through you. You have so much to share!

Study 6

Restoring the lost

Luke 15:1-32

Read Luke 15:1-2.

Jesus' last words in the previous chapter were: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (14:35). The ones who sincerely respond to him here are "tax-collectors and sinners," those considered by the religious leaders as lost, with no hope of ever belonging to the Kingdom, the community of God's family. These religious leaders, Pharisees and scribes, now grumble that Jesus, highly regarded as prophet and teacher, receives these lost and eats with them.

1. What does this receiving and eating with them signify?

The Lost Sheep

Read Luke 15:3-7.

The basis of this parable is embedded in the prophetic promises of the Old Testament. Look up Jeremiah 23:1-2; 50:6-7, and Ezekial 34:1-10.

2. Who are the lost sheep in these passages? How did they become lost?
3. Who were the lost sheep in Jesus' time? Are there parallels today?
4. Does the image we portray of Christianity turn people away or draw them into the Kingdom of God?

**Read: Jeremiah 23:3-6;
Ezekial 34:11-24;
Isaiah 40:10-11.**

5. Who is the good shepherd in these texts? How does he gather the sheep into his fold? How does he do it today?

Note the heavenly joy over everyone who "hears" and accepts the invitation to the Kingdom, to live as a child of God!

The Lost Coin

Read Luke 15:8-10.

Note how Jesus proclaims this message equally to women as to men. He thus parallels a story about a male with one about a female to make the same point (cf. also Luke 13:18-21). The participation of women in "hearing" and ministering with Jesus is made clear in all the Gospels, but particularly in Luke (cf. 1:6-7; 2:36-38; 4:25,38; 7:11-15, 36-50; 8:1-3,19-21,43-56; 10:38-42; 11:27; 13:10-17). This would have been very unusual in the culture of that day.

6. What implications can you draw from this? From this parable?

Note the heavenly joy again. Contrast with the grumbling of the religious leaders.

The Lost Son

Read Luke 15:11-24.

These well-known verses build on the previous two parables and expand on the heavenly Father's great joy at being able to receive the lost back into his Kingdom.

But note the following:

- a) The younger son's action: he demands to receive his inheritance now, before his father is dead, a sign of disrespect and self-centredness.
 - b) The father is under no obligation, but graciously divides his estate and allows the younger son to sell his portion, thus diminishing the family farm and his father's income.
 - c) The younger son wastes his inheritance in loose living, finds himself penniless, homeless, and jobless. He survives only by feeding pigs for a gentile farmer in return for a bit of food. No self-respecting Jew would ever do this. He has hit bottom.
 - d) His hunger leads him to return in shame. He cannot expect any favours. He has humiliated his father and used up his inheritance. He can only ask his father for a job as a servant.
 - e) When he is still "at a distance", the father sees him, runs to him, embraces and kisses him in a show of love.
 - f) The son begins to acknowledge his wrong and ask for a job. But before he can finish, he is swept off his feet by his father's love, dressed in new clothes, and given a dinner in his honour as a long-lost son.
7. Discuss these points carefully considering the role of the father and the action of the son. Who is the father, who is the son in this parable?

8. What is Jesus saying here about the Kingdom?
9. Who would be the lost son in our society?
10. Where do we stand in relation to the son and the father?

The elder son

Read Luke 15:25-32.

Slip into the shoes of the elder son for a moment. Your younger brother who diminished the family property and consequently its income, who brought disgrace on the family by his incompetence and loose living, has returned home. Instead of being put in his place, he is given a celebration. How do you feel? Angry, resentment, slighted?

11. Who is the elder son in the context in which Jesus tells the parable?
12. Who would be the elder son in our situation today?
13. Consider the parable of the labourers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16. Is there a parallel here to the case of the two sons?
14. Jesus does not tell us how the elder son reacted to his father's response in vv. 31-32. How would you react?

Remember how our heavenly Father rejoices over us. Just let that joy overflow to others. Let's join the banquet!

Study 7

Rich or poor, God knocks on every door

Luke 16:19-31

There was a popular belief in Jesus' time that a righteous person suffered in this life for the few unrighteous things he had done, but in the life to come would enjoy the blessings for the many righteous deeds performed. Conversely, the unrighteous person would experience blessings in this life for the few good deeds done, but would suffer in eternity for the many unrighteous deeds committed while living. This story of the rich man and poor Lazarus appears at first to be just such a story of a dramatic and inevitable reversal of fortunes. Cf. Luke 6:20, 24.

Read Luke 16:19-31 carefully.

1. What does it say about the moral attributes of either person? Does Jesus say why Lazarus is carried by angels to Abraham's bosom? Is any reason given why the rich man finished up in Hades in torment? Is it because one is poor and the other rich?

Let us examine further and discuss how these two types are described.

The rich man

He is clothed in purple and fine linen, symbols of royalty and wealth. Cf. 7:25; Amos 6:4-7.

He feasted sumptuously every day. "Feasted sumptuously" is the same word which is translated as "be merry" in 12:19 and 15:23-32. Compare and contrast the story of the rich man in 12:16-21 with the father in 15:23-30.

2. What implications can you draw? He addressed Abraham as "father." Cf. 3:7-9.
3. What does the Baptist's message tell us about the rich man?

He has five brothers who are like him—they do not "hear" Moses and the prophets. See what they say about the rich in Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 15:1-11; Amos 2:6-8; Micah 3:1-3; Jeremiah 5:25-29; Isaiah 58:6-12.

4. What is the significance of v. 31, particularly the phrase, "if someone should rise from the dead"? What does it indicate in relation to the rich man?

He finished up in Hades in torment.

The poor man

He is named "Lazarus," the Greek rendering of a shortened form of the Hebrew "Eliezer," meaning "my God helps."

He lay at the gate of the rich man, literally, he was 'put down' at the gate, signifying he was crippled and left there specifically for the purpose of begging. This was to take advantage of one of the "acts of righteousness," almsgiving, required by the Pharisees (cf Matthew 6:1-4).

He desired to be fed from what fell from the rich man's table, cf. Matthew 15:21-28. Note that both "Canaanite" and "dog" were pejorative terms for "outsiders."

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Dogs came and licked his sores—a sign of his being utterly rejected and outcast. For dogs and those associated with them were unclean. Cf. Exodus 22:31; 1 Kings 21:19, 23-24; 22:38.

In the afterlife he is seen reclining in the “bosom of Abraham.” Cf. 13:25-29. Keep in mind that people at a banquet in those days reclined, cf. John 13:23. Lazarus is now feasting in the Kingdom of God.

After discussing the significance of the various points about each, we can respond to the following questions:

5. What does this story really say about the rich and the poor?

6. What are some of the implications for our society today?
7. Where do we fit into this picture?
8. What does it say to us about reaching out to others?
9. What are some of the ways?
10. What is always our motivation?

Remember, we are the body of Christ who says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to him and eat with him and he with me” (Revelation 3:20)

Study 8

The example of Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

More than the other Gospel writers, Luke has recorded sayings of Jesus which emphasize giving to the poor and the danger of riches. Already before Jesus' birth, Mary praises God because "he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away" (1:53). Besides the story of the rich young ruler (18:18-30), warning against riches (8:14; 9:25) and condemnation of scribes who prey on widows (20:45-47) which he shares with other Gospels, Luke has a number of parables and sayings on possessions and the rich which are unique. He has the woes on the rich in contrast to blessings on the poor (6:24-26), the parable of the rich fool (12:13-21), advice to invite the poor to one's banquet rather than the rich (14:12-14), a call for renunciation of possessions (14:33), parable of the unjust steward (16:1-9), and the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus (16:19-31). Generally, the rich are seen in a bad light, but this is not the case in this story of Zacchaeus, which is also unique to Luke's Gospel.

Note also the stories leading up to this one—the contrast between the self-righteous Pharisee and the despised tax collector (18:9-14), the rich young ruler whose riches prevented him from receiving the Kingdom like a child (18:15-30), the blind man who receives his sight (18:35-43).

Read Luke 19:1-5.

1. What comparisons can you draw between Zacchaeus and the characters in the previous chapter? What parallels do you see with the call of another tax collector, Levi in 5:27-32? What do you know about the status of tax collectors in Jewish society at that time?
2. Why do you think Jesus chose Zacchaeus out of the crowd?

Read Luke 19:6-10.

Zacchaeus received Jesus into his house "rejoicing."

3. Check out the significance of this word in 2:10; 6:23; 15:5, 7, 9, 10, 32. Who are the "grumblers" in v. 7? On what basis is Zacchaeus regarded by them as a "sinner"? See 5:30-32; 7:34, 37-39; 15:1-2, 7, 10; 18:13.

The popular suspicion, encouraged by the Pharisees, was that tax collectors did not live by the covenant law and took more in taxes in order to enrich themselves. Besides, they were seen as collaborators with the enemy. Some rabbis put tax collectors in the same category as murderers and robbers, maintained that their presence in someone's house rendered it unclean, and denied them civil rights.

In v. 8 Zacchaeus confronts these unstated accusations by asserting that he does far more than the law required by giving half of his possessions to the poor

and making four-fold restitution (cf. Exodus 22:1) if he ever defrauded anyone. Rabbis at that time only required a two-fold restitution. In doing this he was carrying out what Jesus had called his disciples to practise. See 6:30-31, 38; 12:32-34; 16:9.

Note that Zacchaeus was characterized as “chief tax collector” and as “rich” in v.2.

4. What is Jesus teaching us in this story about the use of labels?
5. What label does Jesus give Zacchaeus in v. 9? Why? Consider these references: 3:8; 13:16, 28; 16:22-30; Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-4.

6. What does the label, Son of man, which Jesus applies to himself mean for us? (See the discussion of that designation in Study 2)

Note that Jesus states the mission of gathering into the Kingdom as being “to seek and to save the lost.” Compare the use of the term “the lost” with 15:4, 6, 9, 24, 32. How is Zacchaeus one of the lost?

7. What implications does this have for us? For our reaching out to others?

Remember, it is the Word of God which has brought us into the Kingdom to know the Father’s love. Just let that Word speak through you!