

Themes in the Gospel according to Luke

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About the Author

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About the Contributor for the Youth Options

Deacon Deborah Poole serves as the SC Synod Coordinator for Children and Youth. She recently retired after 30 years as Coordinator for Family Ministries at Mt. Hermon (1993-2005) and Pisgah (2005-2023) Lutheran Churches. Deborah lives in Lexington, and enjoys reading and gardening.

Scripture Studies from the South Carolina Synod

During the South Carolina Synod Assembly in 2023, a Resolution on *Living into the Unity of the Body of Christ* was presented and adopted. The hope of this resolution was to encourage our congregations to unite in the study of Scripture and renew their love for the sacred texts by taking a deeper look together at even the challenging passages that can be difficult to understand in our current contexts. We recognize that the Scriptures were originally written in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic and that the collection of books was initially intended for people who lived several thousand years ago, but we also know that the Scriptures are God's living Word for us today. So, how can we best study Scripture and what can they mean for our growth in faith and life?

A group of leaders in the South Carolina Synod were gathered to serve as the Synod Bible Team to collaborate on ways we could fulfill the hope of the Resolution. Knowing that Bible Study is best done together and not alone, this Bible Team has worked together over the past year to create materials that can be used with small groups in any congregation. Our hope is that these studies will be a blessing to all who use them.

These Studies are being shared in two sections. Section One will be sent out in May 2024 to allow leaders to prepare for group studies that may be used beginning August 2024 through January 2025. Section Two will be shared in the Fall of 2024 to allow leaders to prepare for group studies that may be used beginning February through July 2025. In an effort to make this user friendly we did not date any of the courses. You may use them in whatever order you wish, and you may claim the flexibility to use the material in a timeline that suits the needs in your context. Each Study also includes questions and/or activities that can be used to supplement the study when offered to Youth.

The South Carolina Synod Bible Team includes: Josh Kestner, Josh Knutson, Shelley Allen, Steven Gallego, Kevin Ogilvie, Lisa Isenhower, Bobby Morris, Joanna Gragg, Libby Bedenbaugh, Arden Hallman, Heather Apel, Deborah Poole, Wayne Kannaday, Ginny Aebischer.

Section One Studies:

1. Introduction to What the Bible is and What the Bible is not
2. Themes in the Gospel according to Luke
3. What Child is This? How the Old Testament Prepares us for the Coming of God's Messiah
4. Jesus is Born: Matthew and Luke's Birth Stories
5. Reading Revelation: Finding Good News in the Scariest Book of the Bible

It has been said, "Jesus didn't even mention many of the issues that divide us, but Jesus did have something important to say about unity." (see John 17)

Blessings in your Study of Scripture,

+*Bishop Ginny Aebischer*

Themes in the Gospel of Luke

Introduction: Luke is one of four gospels in the New Testament, but it is the only one of the four that has a sequel. Luke tells the story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection, and the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the church's birth and early growth. Sometimes, the two books are referred to as "Luke-Acts." The author of the two books tells us at the beginning of the gospel that he is writing in order to set down "an orderly account" of Jesus' story so that his reader might "know the truth" about Jesus (Luke 1:3-4).

Much of Luke's material comes from the gospel of Mark (believed to be the oldest of the four gospels), and much of Luke is also contained in Matthew's gospel (although often ordered and shaped differently). Scholars believe that Luke and Matthew both drew from Mark's gospel but that they also shared a second source of stories and sayings about Jesus. To put it simply, Luke and Matthew have stories and sayings in common that do not exist in either Mark or John.

Although each of the four gospels tells the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, each one tells that story differently. And in spite of the material that Luke shares with Matthew and Mark, the author of Luke arranges that material in a unique way. Luke's telling of the gospel story is distinctive, and this brief study will touch on some of the major themes that make it so.

In this six-session Bible study, we will examine six themes of the Gospel according to Luke. While this study can be used at any time, it is intended to serve as a kind of introduction to the gospel readings of Lectionary Year C, which begins with the first Sunday of Advent on December 1, 2024. Each of these sessions includes scripture readings from Luke, discussion questions to guide your reading, questions to help you explore ways these readings might speak to us and to the church today, and a closing prayer. May God bless your reading and study of the Word.

Session One: The fulfilment of God's promises to Israel.

From very early in Luke's gospel, we hear of the faithfulness of God to the people of Israel, who were God's chosen people. Luke begins with two birth stories: the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus. Luke depicts both of these births as fulfilling God's promises to the people of Israel.

When the angel tells the elderly priest Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth will have a son, he also tells Zechariah that they will name the boy John, and that "he will be great in the sight of the Lord" and "will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God" in order to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:15-17). For his part, Zechariah sees God acting in and through the birth of his child John—acting in faithfulness to the covenant God made with Abraham and in concert with the words of the prophets of Israel's past.

When Simeon, an old man who "was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel" encounters the infant Jesus at his presentation in the temple, he proclaims that he has "seen [God's] salvation," in the child and recognizes in Jesus "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2: 25, 32).

Read: Luke 1:57-80

⁵⁷Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." ⁶¹They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." ⁶²Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. ⁶⁴Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

⁷¹that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

⁷²Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,

⁷³the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,

to grant us ⁷⁴that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,

might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,

⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁰The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Read: Luke 2:21-32

²¹After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

²²When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), ²⁴and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Consider: Listen to the song "The Angel Gabriel" by Steve Bell here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixNvylzNTiA>

1. Have you ever experienced something that you knew to be an answer to prayer? If so, how did it make you feel?
2. Think of a time that you felt you were a part of something much bigger than yourself and your family. What was happening? How did that feel?

3. When have you achieved the fulfillment or completion of a long-standing goal, something you worked and waited for over a number of months or years? Describe your experience.

Explore the passages:

4. Can you think of other people in the Bible like Zechariah and Elizabeth, who became parents late in life? (See Genesis 17, 1 Samuel 1 and 2) How is the story of John the Baptist's birth similar?
5. Which Old Testament figures does Zechariah name in his prophecy? Why do you think he mentions these two in particular?
6. According to Luke 1:78-79, what is God doing through John?
7. What does the prophecy of Zechariah tell us about God and God's ways?
8. Why do Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple eight days after his birth? What does this tell us about them as parents and as Jewish believers?
9. Who is Simeon and what kind of person is he, according to Luke?
10. What does Simeon think about the infant Jesus?
11. How are Simeon's words similar to Zechariah's words?

Luke's message for today:

12. Just as Zechariah did, we believe that God sent John to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah. And just as Zechariah bore witness to what God was doing, we are to bear witness to the ways that God is active among us, here and now. How do you see God at work in and through your congregation?
13. God, in "tender mercy," sent Jesus "to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death," (Luke 1:78-79). Who are the people who sit in darkness and the shadow of death today?
14. As the body of Christ, how might we participate in what God is doing for these people?

Closing Prayer:

Gracious God, you remember your promises always, and you are faithful to keep them. Help us to see your hand at work in our world today, and show us where we can join you in bringing light and love to our world today. Amen.

Session Two: Jesus as Savior.

According to Bible scholar Matt Skinner, Luke's gospel refers to "Jesus as the 'Savior' who brings God's 'salvation' to the world" (from the *Enter the Bible* website course on Luke, the "Theological Themes" section). In fact, Luke is the only one of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) to refer to Jesus as Savior (*New Interpreter's Bible* Volume IX by R. Alan Culpepper, page 19). In Luke, Jesus is the one whom God sends to seek and save the "lost"—a broad category that is not reserved only for those who are spiritually lost. "The lost" can include those whose lives are limited by illness or poverty as well as those who are shunned by or excluded from their community. In Luke's gospel, salvation through Jesus comes in the form of healing and restoration in the here and now and not only in the form of life after death.

Although Luke is concerned with Jesus as God's faithful provision for the people of Israel, Luke's gospel describes Jesus as the savior for *all* people and not for Israel alone. The "good news of great joy" is "for all the people" of the world (Luke 2:10).

Read: Luke 2:8-14

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Read: Luke 19:1-10

¹[Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." ⁹Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Consider:

Look at the painting "The Birth of Jesus with Shepherds" here:

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/diglib-viewimage.pl?SID=20240407284037254&code=act&RC=48387&Row=&code=act&return=act>

Look at the painting "Zacchaeus" by Irene Thomas here:

<https://www.catholicworldart.com/Zacchaeus.html>

1. What do you think of when you hear the phrase "good news"? Do you think of something that applies to you alone, or do you think of something more public or general?
2. What or who would you go to great lengths to see? Why?

3. Think of an experience you have had that made you want to change something fundamental about your life. What was it? How did you change because of it?

Explore the passages:

4. Can you think of any characters from the Old Testament who were shepherds? Why were they important in the life of Israel?
5. Why is it significant that Jesus was born in “the city of David”?
6. Luke tells us that Herod was King of Judea and Augustus was Emperor of Rome, yet the angel of the Lord appeared to Zachariah (a priest), Mary (a teenaged girl), and to the unnamed shepherds in our reading. Why do you think God sent the angel to such ordinary people rather than to the powerful people?
7. Emperor Augustus ushered in the age of the *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace. How is it significant that the angel host sang “on earth peace among those whom [God] favors” to the shepherds? What will be the difference between the *Pax Romana* and God’s peace?
8. Why would Zacchaeus have wanted to see Jesus? Why would Jesus have wanted to go to Zacchaeus’s house?
9. Why would the people have thought of Zacchaeus as a sinner? In what sense is Zacchaeus “the lost” before his encounter with Jesus?
10. Why do you think Zacchaeus promised to pay back four times the amount he took from those he defrauded?
11. What does Zacchaeus’s story tell us about who can receive salvation?

Luke’s message for today:

12. How do you think of peace? Is it simply an absence of war or conflict, or is it something more than that?
13. The shepherds of Luke 2 were humble, hard-working people. Who are the 21st century equivalents of the shepherds? What is the angel’s message for them?
14. Who are the modern-day equivalents of Zacchaeus the tax collector? How might we offer good news to the Zacchaeuses of today?

Closing prayer:

Dearest Jesus, you came to bring peace: peace to the world and peace to our hearts and minds. Help us to set aside those things that keep us from enjoying the peace you came to bring, and help us to share your peace in our community. Amen.

Session Three: Money, possessions, and the poor

Luke’s gospel expresses concern for the poor, and Jesus has much to say about money and possessions in Luke. In Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler, Luke draws attention to the hold that riches and wealth have on people. In his comments on the poor widow’s offering, Jesus praises the person who gives a bigger proportion of her possessions to God; the monetary value of the gift is less important than the sacrifice it represents.

At the time of Jesus' public ministry, it was commonly believed that people who had wealth had received it as a blessing from God. Jesus turns that notion upside down when he declares that the poor are "blessed" and proclaims "woe" to the rich (Luke 6:20, 24).

Read: Luke 18:18-27

¹⁸A certain ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.'" ²¹He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth." ²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²³But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. ²⁴Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷He replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

Read Luke 21:1-4

¹He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; ²he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; ⁴for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."

Consider:

Watch this depiction of the rich young ruler:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QY7tVGFQVLw>

Watch this depiction of the widow putting her coins in the treasury:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-chE-Caocg>

1. Consider what you were taught about wealth and money as you were growing up. Is money a blessing? Something you have earned? A sign of God's favor?
2. Why might a wealthy person have a harder time being generous than a person with less financial resources?
3. How might generosity help a person draw closer to God?

Explore the passages:

4. Prior to the ruler's question, Jesus receives children and says, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:17). Do you think the ruler is asking about himself (an adult) in light of Jesus' pronouncement about children. In other words, "what about us grownups?"

5. Why do you think Jesus answers the ruler with the commandments? What is the connection between the commandments (the covenant God made with the people through Moses) and eternal life?
6. According to Jesus, where is the ruler's treasure now? What will it take for him to have "treasure in heaven"?
7. The passage about the widow's offering comes on the heels of Jesus' harsh criticism of the scribes in Luke 20:45-47. One of the things Jesus says about them is that "they devour widows' houses." Widows were especially vulnerable then because they could not inherit their husbands' households. If their relatives did not provide for them, officials like the scribes might be enlisted to help them. Here, Jesus is saying that some of the scribes did not help but rather hurt the situation of widows.
8. In Luke 21:1-2, Jesus sees both "the rich" and "a poor widow" putting their offerings in the temple treasury. The widow puts in "two small copper coins," which, according to the New Interpreter's Bible, are "lepta," and they are the smallest coins in use at the time (*The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume IX, page 395). "It would have taken 128 lepta to make a denarius, a day's wage." (See footnote on 396). Why is the widow's gift more commendable than the much larger gift of a rich person?
9. How might Jesus's words in verse 4 be both praise and lament?

Luke's message for today:

10. The people of Israel were commanded by God to provide for widows and orphans. How do we, as God's people, provide such care today? Are there churches in our synod that offer such care?
11. How does our relationship with money today affect our relationship with God?
12. What does "sacrificial giving" mean to you?
13. If you have given sacrificially, how has it affected you?

Closing Prayer:

Generous God, you know the hold that possessions can have on us. Help us to loosen our grip on material things and to give generously to the work of your church, knowing that where we put our treasure, our hearts will surely follow. Amen.

Session Four: The Great Reversal

The "great reversal," which means that in God's kingdom, roles and destinies will be reversed, is another important theme in Luke's gospel. The poor will be rich, the sick will be well, the sad will leap for joy. This idea affirms God's care for those who are most vulnerable and God's provision for those who are in need. The kingdom that Jesus has inaugurated will put right what sin has made wrong in our world.

From the very beginning of Luke's gospel, we see this theme in action. An elderly infertile couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, learn that they will have a baby boy. To be childless "was regarded as a tragedy, a disgrace, and even a sign of God's

punishment” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Volume IX, page 45), so to have a child, even in old age, would have been a huge reversal of misfortune. Elizabeth says of her pregnancy, “This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people” (Luke 1:25). Mary also expresses the idea of a reversal of fortune when she says (sings?) “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;” (Luke 1:46-48).

Read: Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, ⁵² he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

Read: Luke 6:20-38

²⁰Then [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹"Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²²Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

²⁴"But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵"Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you;

and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Consider:

Listen to the Canticle of the Turning here: <https://youtu.be/F9QeTmRCpW4>

1. Can you think of a time when you were so happy or so amazed by something that you actually shouted for joy? What was the situation?
2. What is your favorite rags-to-riches or "underdog" story? Why do you think such stories are so popular?
3. How is the idea of reversal good news for us? How might it be ominous news?

Explore the passages:

4. Only in Luke do we see and hear the birth of Jesus from Mary's point of view. Why do you think Luke wanted to include Mary's story?
5. Mary accepts her role in God's plan, but she quickly travels to her relative Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah, to share the news with her. Why do you think Mary sought out Elizabeth?
6. Read Luke 1:39-45. How does Mary respond to Elizabeth's words to her?
7. How does Mary view her role in the history of her people?
8. Is Mary an "underdog"? Why or why not?
9. Read Exodus 15. How is Moses's song similar to Mary's?
10. Matthew's gospel has Jesus preach the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) on a mountain while Luke has these sayings delivered by Jesus "down . . . on a level place" (Luke 6:17). What other differences do you notice between Matthew's version and Luke's version?
11. If Luke 6:20-23 are comforting words to oppressed and suffering people, what can we say about Luke 6:24-26?
12. Is the kind of reversal Jesus talks about in Luke 6:24-26 inevitable? If so, what should we do?

Luke's message for today:

13. Are you rich? How do you know?

14. If we are rich by the standards of most of the world, should we feel guilty about it?
15. Jesus talked about money frequently, yet we are often reluctant to talk about money in the church. Why do you think this is so?
16. What can we, individually and in our congregations, do to help bring the blessings Jesus spoke of to the poor and hungry of our world?

Closing Prayer:

Merciful God, you champion the poor and the needy, and you call us to join you in your mission to redeem the world. Help us not to judge but rather to show mercy; help us not to hoard our wealth but rather to share it. Give us the strength to join you in caring for the world. Amen.

Session Five: Prayer

Jesus prays frequently in Luke's gospel. At his baptism by John, Jesus is praying when the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends on him (Luke 3:21). As word of Jesus' ministry of healing spreads and people crowd around him, Jesus at times must "withdraw to deserted places and pray" (Luke 5:16). And just before Jesus chooses twelve of his disciples to be the apostles (the "sent ones"), he spends a night in prayer (Luke 6:12).

This depiction of Jesus' prayer life emphasizes his connection to and reliance upon God the Father. Jesus also models this behavior for his disciples, whom he teaches to pray. The apostles will come to rely on prayer as they work to spread the good news about Jesus in Acts.

Read: Luke 11:1-13

¹He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ²He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.

³Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial."

⁵And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be

opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Read: Luke 18:1-8

¹Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" ⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Consider:

Watch this scene from the series "The Chosen:"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxuVOVrBaHg>

1. Is it hard to have a good conversation with someone you rarely see or speak to? How does frequent conversation with people deepen our relationships with them?
2. On one occasion, Martin Luther is believed to have said: "I have so much to do today that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." What can you infer about Luther from that quote?
3. If Jesus the Son of God already knows the heart of God the Father, why do you think he prays?

Explore the passages:

4. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer differs a bit from Matthew's (see Matthew 6:9-13). Which version is most like the one we pray together in worship?
5. Why do you think Jesus taught his disciples to call God "Father" when they pray?
6. Even though Luke does not begin the prayer with "our Father," the word "our" appears in several other places in the prayer—"our daily bread," "our sins." What do these plural pronouns say about how we are to pray? In other words, is prayer always an individual thing, or is it a communal exercise?
7. Matthew's prayer speaks of "debts" while Luke's speaks of "sins." How are those two ideas different? How are they the same? Which do you prefer and why?
8. What does the parable in Luke 11:5-8 teach about prayer?
9. Is Luke 11:9 really true, in your experience? Do we always get what we ask for in prayer?

10. How does Luke 11:13 help shed light on what we should be asking for when we pray?
11. The parable in Luke 18:1-8 tells of a judge and a widow. Judges were expected to judge fairly, and widows were expected to be cared for and treated fairly since they were vulnerable (they could not inherit their husband's estate). Why do you think Jesus describes this judge as a person "who neither feared God nor had respect for people"?
12. How does the widow in the parable get justice from the unjust judge?
13. What does the widow's behavior tell us about how we are to pray?

Luke's message for today:

14. Do you pray for things you need or want? Why or why not?
15. Have you ever had a prayer partner, someone with whom and for whom you pray on a regular basis?
16. If God knows what we need, why should we take time to ask God for those things?
17. Who prays the "prayers of intercession" in your congregation, the pastor or a lay person? Does it make a difference? Would you want to be the one who prays on behalf of the congregation?

Closing prayer:

Loving Lord, you have taught us how to pray, yet too often we rush through the words of the prayer you gave us. Slow us down, Lord, and help us to take our time when we come to you in prayer. As we draw near to you in prayer, draw near to us in ways that make us more truly the people you created us to be. Amen.

Session Six: The Parables

Luke contains many parables, which are usually short stories told by Jesus to illustrate some aspect of the kingdom of God. Many of the parables present a surprising picture of God and of God's intentions for the world. For example, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus provides the lawyer with a surprising answer to his question, "And who is my neighbor?" No one expects the hero of the story to be a Samaritan since Samaritans and Israelites were enemies.

Many of the most memorable and beloved parables appear only in Luke's gospel and include the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Luke's storytelling is in top form in his telling of these teaching stories of Jesus.

The parables of Jesus use everyday items and experiences (eg., losing a coin, planting seeds, throwing a dinner party) to illustrate truths about the kingdom of God. As such, they are not allegories; that is, every item in a parable does not correspond to some other item as it might in a coded message or allegory. The importance of the parables lies in the overall meaning they convey and the surprising ways that meaning is conveyed. For example, in the Parable of the Lost Sheep, it is not important to find a one-to-one correspondence between the

elements of the story and the spiritual truth conveyed. Instead, the surprising point of the story is God's overwhelming concern with seeking and saving the lost.

Read: Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Read Luke 15:11-32

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe — the best one

— and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! And they began to celebrate. ²⁵Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Consider:

Look at the painting “The Good Samaritan” by Vincent Van Gogh here:

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/diglib-viewimage.pl?SID=20240410265484293&code=act&RC=54697&Row=&code=act&return=act>

Look at the painting “Forgiving Father” by Frank Wesley here:

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/diglib-viewimage.pl?SID=20240410265484293&code=act&RC=59207&Row=&code=act&return=act>

1. Have you ever experienced kindness from an unexpected source? If so, did it cause you to reassess your assumptions about the person who did you the kindness?
2. How would you explain the difference between fair treatment and equal treatment?
3. When have you acted as a “good Samaritan” to someone? When has someone been a “good Samaritan” to you?

Explore the passages:

4. In Luke 10:25, we read that “a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.” Do you think the lawyer (expert in the Law of Moses) meant his question kindly, or do you think his intentions are more hostile?
5. How is the Parable of the Good Samaritan an answer to the lawyer’s question, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29).
6. Those listening to Jesus would have expected a series of three travelers, but according to Alan Culpepper, “the expected sequence would be a priest, a Levite, and then an Israelite” (*New Interpreter’s Bible* Volume IX, page 229). Why would Jesus’ first hearers be shocked that the third traveler was a Samaritan?

7. From the perspective of the man who had been robbed and beaten, did it matter that his rescuer was a Samaritan?
8. According to Luke 10:33, what is the Samaritan's response when he sees the man? Why do you think the first two (the priest and the Levite) do not respond in the same way?
9. We know the parable in Luke 15:11-32 as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Alan Culpepper suggests that a better title would be "The Prodigal Son, the Waiting Father, and the Elder Brother" (*The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume IX, pages 298, 300). What do you think of this suggestion?
10. When the younger son demands the share of the property that will eventually come to him (at his father's death), his demand is disrespectful and rather unusual. It's an indication that he is cutting all ties with his family. In light of that, how is the father's response surprising? What might we have expected the father to do when the younger son returned?
11. How does this parable present a picture of God's unfailing love and mercy toward sinners?
12. The elder brother does not need his father's forgiveness, yet he begrudges the forgiveness his father shows to his younger sibling. Do you think the elder brother eventually joins the party? Why or why not?

Luke's message for today:

13. What do you think it means to be a neighbor to someone?
14. Who are the "Samaritans" in our communities today?
15. Are there situations in which you would be reluctant to serve as a Good Samaritan?
16. Which character do you identify most strongly with in the Parable of the Prodigal Son: the younger son, the father, or the elder son?
17. Have you ever said, "I will forgive, but I won't forget"? How is forgiveness without forgetting really not forgiveness at all?

Closing Prayer:

God of grace and mercy, you are always caring for us, always forgiving us, and always welcoming us. Help us to show mercy as we have been shown mercy, to forgive as we have been forgiven, and to welcome everyone into our community of faith. Amen.

Youth Options for this Course

Created by Deborah Poole

THEMES IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

SESSION 1

Game: "Promise or Not?"

Divide into teams and prepare a list of statements. Some statements should be Biblical promises, while others are not. Each team must identify whether the statement is a promise from God or not. The team with the most correct answers wins!

SESSION 2

Called by Name

- Ask the group to form a large circle.
- Give one player a soft ball. They should pick someone, shout their name, and throw them the ball.
- Play continues until everyone in the group has been called.
- Once someone's name has been called, he cannot get it again.
- At this point, add a second or third ball and continue so all balls are in motion at the same time.

Activity - My Favorite Things

Hand out a piece of poster board/construction paper and crayons/markers to each student.

Each student will be making a poster that celebrates his or her favorite things.

Students can put as many "favorites" as they want on their posters, and they can decorate the posters however they see fit.

Tell the students that this is their chance to convince each other of their "faves."

Examples might include:

TV show

Movie

Color

Actor/Actress

Teacher

Subject

Song

Band

Restaurant

Fast food meal

Soda flavor

Once students have completed their posters, spend some time letting the students tell everyone about their favorites.

Challenge them on a few of their choices to liven up the conversation and have them defend their opinions.

- How easy is it to share the good news of Jesus? Why or why not?

SESSION 3

Activity - Doodles

Divide the young people into pairs. Explain that the group will be creating artwork on money, possessions, and the poor. Each pair can either create a strip cartoon or a single image.

Write up the Bible references on a flipchart as the basis for each cartoon. Ask each pair to select a verse or passage, and let the doodling begin!

- Luke 18:18-27
- Luke 21:1-4

Share with group.

SESSION 4

Activity - Rewrite the Beatitudes in your own Words.

Students will be able to come to a deeper understanding of what each beatitude means if they are able to paraphrase what Jesus actually said. You will have to do some work to define and explain terms like meek, poor in spirit, righteousness, etc. May work individually or on their own. Share. Sheet at end.

SESSION 5

Activity - The Cell Phone Prayer

Have the youth open a new note on their cell phones and encourage them to list the names of people they want to pray for. They can also list their top three concerns to pray over. Encourage them to pray daily.

SESSION 6

Activity - Lead them in a Meditation.

Ask the students to get in a comfortable position, put on some soft music and ask them the following questions to get them to relate the story to their life. Add other questions as you would like.

- How are you like the . . . in the story?
- Have you ever . . . like this story?
- Is anyone like the . . . in the story?
- Who are they . . . in the story today?
- If you were the . . . in the story, how would you react?

The Beatitudes	Our Words
"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."	
"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled."	
"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."	
Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets."	
"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation."	
"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry."	
"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep."	
"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."	

