

# THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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Six Part Life Group Kit



# The Gospel of Luke

## Six Part Life Group Kit

Clayton Church of Christ is spending some time reading through the Gospel of Luke together in our sermon series, “***Luke: Rethink and Refresh***” and so, in order to enhance our understanding of Luke, we have developed a 6-part Life Group Kit that can be used alongside the sermon series.

The Luke Life Group Kit is not a match for the sermon series, it is an extension of the sermon series and covers different passages and themes so that we have a fuller understanding of this wonderful Gospel. So please take this Life Group Kit at your own pace so that your Life Group gets the most out of the time together.

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## **How to use the Life Group Kit**

Nearly all part of this Life Group Kit have a similar format:

- 1. Scripture Reference**
- 2. Reflection**
- 3. Questions**
- 4. Enrichment Activity**

Only the first part does not follow this format. Some parts suggest viewing a short video from YouTube, so please keep this in mind.

# Introduction to this Life Group Kit

As we go through passages in the Gospel of Luke in our Sunday Service, we also want to journey through Luke in our Life Groups. The Life Group Kit for Luke is opportunity for you and your Life Group to explore even more of the gospel than what will be covered on Sundays.

The Gospel of Luke has so many unique passages and stories of Jesus that are not shared in any of the other gospels, and so this Life Group Kit gives you the chance for extra insight. We have chosen only six of the many unique parables and passages to focus on. If you are interested in all the unique passages that Luke offers his readers, here they are listed below:

## **Parables:**

The Good Samaritan (10: 29-37)

The Importunate Friend (11:5-8)

The Rich Man who built bigger barns (12:16-21)

The Fig Tree (13:6-9) -- transformation of fig tree episode in Mark and Matthew.

The Prodigal Son (15:11-32)

The Crafty Steward (16:1-9)

The Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31)

The Unscrupulous Judge (18:1-8)

The Publican and the Sinner (18:9-14)

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## **Teachings:**

Warning about greed (12: 13-15)  
Suffering not linked to guilt (13:1-5)  
Places of honour at table (14:7-14)  
Costs of discipleship (14: 25-35)  
Necessity of a purse and a sword (22:35-38)

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### **Narrative episodes:**

Entire infancy narrative: birth of John the Baptist, birth of Jesus, presentation in temple, his encounter in temple with teachers of the Law (Chapters 1 and 2)  
Miraculous draft of fish (5:1-11)  
Widow's son at Nain (7:11-17)  
Woman who bathes Jesus' feet with tears (7:36-50)  
The women who accompany Jesus (8:2-3)  
Sending of the seventy-two (10:1-2)  
Martha and Mary (10:38-42)  
Healing of a crippled woman on the Sabbath (13:10-13)  
Healing of a dropsical man on the Sabbath (14:1-6)  
The Samaritan leper (17:11-19)  
Repentance of Zacchaeus (19:1-10)  
Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (19:41-44)  
Jesus before Herod (23:6-16)  
Meeting with "daughters of Jerusalem" (23:26-32)  
The good and bad thieves (23-39-43)  
Appearance on the road to Emmaus (24:13-35)

## Introduction to Luke:

Luke is a beautiful book and in it we see the importance of the plan and purpose of God. We also see the relationship of the divine plan and human involvement with that plan. The Jesus that we read about in Luke's Gospel overturns the oppressive hierarchical relationships of unredeemed society (which we see in Luke's emphasis on women, his emphasis on the poor, and his emphasis on Jesus' concern for the marginalised and his general concern for life within community). The focus of history, lineage, events, and interpretation shows Luke's interest in 'the facts': Luke surely wanted his readers to know 'what really happened' as well as what those happenings meant within the plan of God.

Through his Gospel Luke highlights the defeat of ungodly rulers and the raising up of the lowly—an emphasis that runs throughout all of Luke–Acts. Luke has a strong connection to Old Testament imagery as he talks about God turning the tables on the corrupt powerful when he talks of God redeeming Israel from the grip of Egyptian slavery.

The combination of words and expressions in the Magnificat, such as “the Mighty One” (Luke 1:49 CSB), “great things” (Luke 1:49), “holy is his name” (Luke 1:49), “strength” (Luke 1:51), “arm” (Luke 1:51), “scattered” (Luke 1:51), “thrones” (Luke 1:52), and “his servant Israel” (Luke 1:54), evokes the first exodus. But, unlike the first exodus, God promises Mary that he will not redeem Israel primarily from the oppression of Rome but from the enslavement of sin and the devil.



‘Luke: The Gospel of the Saviour for the Lost People Everywhere’ written by Mark L. Strauss is an excellent introduction to the Gospel, and we will be using large portions of the article below. For a full reading of it please follow this link:

<https://bibleproject.com/blog/luke-gospels-savior-lost-people/>

or search “Luke: The Gospel of the Savior for Lost People Everywhere – The Bible Project “

Luke’s Gospel stands out as unique among the Gospels in various ways. For one thing, it is the longest of the Gospels, starting earlier in Jesus’ life than the others (with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist), and ending later (with Jesus’ ascension to heaven). Only Luke reveals anything about Jesus’ childhood, describing his family’s visit to Jerusalem when he was 12 years old (Luke 2:41–52). Even more significantly, Luke is the only Gospel writer to provide a sequel, the Book of Acts. Luke continues his story beyond the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to the birth and growth of the early church.

### **The Unity of Luke-Acts**

It is almost unanimously agreed among scholars that there is unity and continuity from Luke to Acts. Not only do we believe that both books were written by the same author, it is also agreed that the books almost like two volumes of a single work. In other words, they are connected to each other as they share a common purpose, a common theme, and common theology. They belong with each other. This means that it is

highly likely that at the time that Luke penned his Gospel, he already had Acts in mind.

The story that Luke starts in the Gospel is continued in Acts, so much so that the two-part work is sometimes referred to as “Luke-Acts”.

The implications of this connection between Luke and Acts means that we need to think of the events that are to come as we read through the book of Luke, and likewise, as we read through Acts we need to keep in mind the themes and theology of the writer from Luke.

Here is a segment of an article written by Mark L. Strauss for The Bible Project about Luke:

### **Luke’s Unique Features and Key Themes**

What distinguishes Luke’s Gospel from the other three? In addition to having a sequel (Acts), here are five unique sections of the Gospel that highlight his themes.

#### **THE PROLOGUE (LUKE 1:1–4): LUKE AS HISTORIAN AND THEOLOGIAN**

Luke and Acts contain some of the finest literary Greek in the New Testament. The Prologue to the Gospel (Luke 1:1–4) is a good example of this. Written in a formal literary style common to Hellenistic authors of Luke’s day, the Prologue sets forth Luke’s purpose. Having carefully investigated the eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry, Luke is writing an “orderly” (well organized) account so that his readers “may know the certainty” of the things they have been taught. The

prologue shows that Luke's purpose is both historical and theological. He is writing as a meticulous historian, investigating and carefully recording the facts in order to confirm the truth of the Christian message. This message especially concerns the continuity between God's promises given to Israel and their fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah and in the Church.

### **THE BIRTH NARRATIVE (LUKE 1:5–2:52): CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE OLD COVENANT AND THE NEW**

This continuity between the old covenant and the new is evident in Luke's birth narrative.

Only Luke and Matthew provide accounts of Jesus' birth. For both, their purpose is not just to fill in gaps about Jesus' early years for curious readers. These birth stories serve rather as overtures, introducing themes of importance for their respective Gospels. After his formal literary prologue (Luke 1:1–4), Luke begins his birth narrative with a very different Hebraic (Jewish) style, reminiscent of the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament: "In the days of Herod, king of Judea..." (Luke 1:5). This is reminiscent to how we might begin a story, "Once upon a time in a land far, far away..." Luke changes style in order to plunge his readers into the world of Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures.

Though Luke does not quote the Old Testament to the same extent that Matthew does, his narrative is full of Old Testament images and motifs. His purpose is to show that this is not the beginning of a new religion. It is the fulfillment of an old one. God's promises to Israel are coming to fulfillment through Jesus the Messiah.

## **THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM (9:51–19:27): GOD’S LOVE FOR THE LOST**

A third unique section of Luke’s Gospel is Jesus’ lengthy “Journey to Jerusalem.” In general, Luke follows Mark’s outline for Jesus’ public ministry. This begins with an extended ministry in Galilee, during which Jesus calls disciples, preaches and teaches, performs miracles, and comes into conflict with the religious leaders (Mark 1–10; Luke 3–9). Jesus then heads to Jerusalem for Passover, where tension with the religious leaders escalates, and he is arrested, crucified, and then rises from the dead.

The most significant structural difference between Mark and Luke is what is variously called Luke’s “Travel Narrative,” “Journey to Jerusalem,” or “Central Section” (Luke 9:51–19:27). In Mark, we first learn Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem in Mark 10:32, and he arrives half a chapter later, in 11:1–11. In Luke, by contrast, Jesus heads toward Jerusalem in Luke 9:51, but doesn’t arrive for ten chapters (Luke 19:28)! Jesus does not head straight for Jerusalem, but instead moves around from place to place. Yet Luke repeatedly reminds the reader that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–56, 13:22, 13:33, 17:11, 18:31, 19:11, 19:28, 19:41). In short, though not a straight-line trip, the journey motif represents a theological theme, stressing Jesus’ resolve to reach his Jerusalem goal.

These ten chapters of the Travel Narrative contain many of Jesus’ most famous parables, such as the Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, the Great Banquet, the Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Persistent Widow, and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. They also contain many memorable stories, including the meal at the home of Mary and Martha,

the healing of ten men with leprosy, and the story of Zacchaeus. This section has sometimes been called “the Gospel for the Outcast,” since so many of the stories and parables relate to God’s love for the lost and the outsider.

## **THE RESURRECTION: THE VINDICATION OF THE SUFFERING MESSIAH**

A fourth passage in Luke’s Gospel that brings out key themes is his account of resurrection appearances in Luke 24. Like the other Gospels, Luke describes the discovery of the empty tomb on Sunday morning by a group of women (Luke 24:1–12). His unique contribution to the resurrection narratives, however, is an account of Jesus’ encounter with two disciples on the road to the town of Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). As these two are walking along, the resurrected Jesus joins them, but they are kept from recognizing him. Jesus asks them what they were talking about on the road and they share the recent events in Jerusalem. Jesus’ remarkable teaching and miracles confirmed that he was a prophet sent from God. But they had hoped that he might be more—the Messiah, Israel’s Redeemer. Sadly, his crucifixion had dashed their hopes.

Jesus says that all along it was God’s plan that the Messiah would suffer and die. While Jesus had spoken previously about himself as a suffering prophet (Luke 4:24, 6:23, 11:47–50, 13:33–34) and as the suffering Son of Man (Luke 9:22, 9:44, 18:31, 22:22, 24:7), this is the first time in the Gospel he explicitly says that the Messiah must suffer and die. From this point on in Luke’s narrative, this refrain is repeated again and again (Luke 24:46; Acts 3:18, 17:3, 26:23). Jesus’ crucifixion does not negate his claim to be the Messiah. Rather, it confirms the claim, since it was predicted in Scripture and was

God's purpose and plan that the Messiah would suffer and rise on the third day, bringing the forgiveness of sins. The disciples' mission, in the power of the Holy Spirit, would be to take this message of salvation to the ends of the earth (Luke 24:44–49; Acts 1:8).

## **THE ASCENSION: EXALTED LORD EMPOWERING HIS CHURCH THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

A fifth event unique to Luke is Jesus' ascension to heaven. Luke recounts it briefly at the end of his Gospel (Luke 24:50–51) and then in more detail at the beginning of Acts (Acts 1:1–11). The ascension is crucial for Luke's narrative for two key reasons. First, together with the resurrection, it serves as vindication that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. In his preaching on the Day of Pentecost, Peter points out that although wicked people put Jesus to death, God raised him from the dead and exalted him to his right hand as Lord and Messiah. Jesus' ascension is proof of his vindication (Acts 2:22–36). Second, it is from this position as reigning Lord and Messiah that Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). The Spirit's coming serves as confirmation that the end times have begun (Acts 2:16–21, citing Joel 2:28–32) and becomes the empowering and guiding force for the apostles throughout Acts, as they take the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

..... [end of article]

### **Who Was Luke and Why Did He Write His Gospel?**

Even without self-identification, Luke is traditionally identified as the author due to his being a physician (Col. 4:14) and a co-worker with the Apostle Paul (Philemon 24), and on-going church tradition.

In Colossians 4:11-14 Paul associates Luke with the Gentiles over his Jewish co-workers, which may help explain Luke's vested interest in the "for all humanity" scope of the Gospel, rather than strictly a Jewish invitation. Luke expounds the

gospel as a message of redemption for all people, not just one people group.

You will read that the books of Luke and Acts are dedicated to Theophilus, but even with this personal dedication, it is clear that the audience that Luke has in mind is much bigger and broader than just one man. As one commentator wrote, “Since he has so many passages affirming the universal scope of salvation, and since he spends so much time in Acts defending Paul and the mission to the Gentiles, it seems likely that he is writing to a church or group of churches that were predominantly Gentiles.”

As we read through Luke-Acts we see that Christianity is not just for one people group, for one race, for one area of the world, but it is a world-wide invitation to follow Jesus, to take up our cross, and to have our lives changed by the power of Jesus.



# Luke Pt 1

## Chapters 1 & 2

**\*Please read all of chapters 1 and 2.**

Below is only “Mary’s Song of Praise”.

### **The Magnificat: Mary’s Song of Praise**

- Chapter 1:46 Mary responded,  
“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.  
47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!  
48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,  
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.  
49 For the Mighty One is holy,  
and he has done great things for me.  
50 He shows mercy from generation to generation  
to all who fear him.  
51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things!  
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.  
52 He has brought down princes from their thrones  
and exalted the humble.  
53 He has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away with empty hands.  
54 He has helped his servant Israel  
and remembered to be merciful.  
55 For he made this promise to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and his children forever.”  
56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then  
went back to her own home.

## Reflection:

Either try searching “The Bible Project – Luke 1-9” on YouTube or follow this link for a video explainer.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIb\\_dCIxZr0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIb_dCIxZr0)

Spend some time as a group reading through Luke chapters 1 & 2. Take note of all the different prophecies, events, cultural happenings and well-known people that are mentioned within the space of two chapters. Why do you think Luke goes to such lengths to provide so much data around the birth of Jesus?

There are two birth announcements in chapter one, John the Baptist and Jesus. Read through the stories and compare the responses from Elizabeth & Zechariah to the responses from Mary & Joseph. What is different about how God’s plan is received? What does that tell you about the hearts of the people involved?

Read Mary’s song of praise, ‘the Magnificat’. Charles Spurgeon wrote that three things are worth noticing:

1. Mary SINGS
2. Mary sings sweetly
3. Mary sings sweetly alone

He concludes, “*Does the Spirit of God this day lead thee to say, “I trust my soul on Jesus?” ... Does thy faith put all her dependence upon what he did, upon what he is, upon what he does? Then Christ is conceived in thee, and thou mayest go thy way with all the joy that Mary knew... My dear friend, if Christ be thine, there is no song on earth too high, too holy for thee to sing; nay, there is no song which thrills from angelic lips, no note which thrills Archangel's tongue in which thou mayest not join. Even this day, the holiest, the happiest, the most glorious of*

*words, and thoughts, and emotions belong to thee. Use them! God help thee to enjoy them; and his be the praise, while thine is the comfort evermore. Amen.”*

As Spurgeon so eloquently put it, do we rejoice when we hear the words of God to us, whatever those words may be? Do we shout praise in knowing that just as God was formed in Mary, so too God’s Spirit lives in us? Do our actions and emotions convey the joy that only comes from knowing the Creator and Sustainer of the universe?

- Discuss how you think your song would sound if you were Mary
- Share what needs to change in you for you to be able to sing

Chapter 2 sees Joseph and Mary heading to Bethlehem. This is obviously a huge change in plans for the expectant parents. Spend some time talking about plans that have changed in your life, and share how it has impacted you. What did you envision VS what is... Use this time to really hear from each other.

Finally, after reading these two chapters, share and pray about how you want to respond to God speaking to you and how you want to respond to changes in life.

## Luke Pt 2

### The Good Samaritan (10:25-37)

#### Luke 10:25-37

#### The Most Important Commandment

25 One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?”

27 The man answered, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

28 “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!”

29 The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

#### Parable of the Good Samaritan

30 Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road.

31 “By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

33 “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. 34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. 35 The next

day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'

36 "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.

37 The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

### **Reflection:**

If you would like to read some background on the Samaritans and how the fracture widened between the Jewish people and Samaritans, the following article briefly outlines some of the long and broken history.

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/daily-life-and-practice/the-samaritan-schism/>

Dr. Amy-Jill Levine explains that Samaritans were not simply outcasts. It was not just the case of Samaritans being from a different group or part of a different ideology. They were the despised enemies of the Jews. As Jesus spoke, this would have created shock. Where listeners would have expected a Jew to be the hero of Jesus' story, instead they would have been taken aback to hear that it is a Samaritan.

Because the hero of the story was a Samaritan, Jesus is potentially drawing a strong contrast between those who knew the law and those who actually followed the law in their lifestyle and conduct.

Like the lawyer (expert in the religious law), there are things that we are happy to do in obedience to Scripture, and then

there are things that we really just don't want to do. Even as Jesus finishes the parable and asks "who did the neighbourly acts?" the lawyer cannot even say the word 'Samaritan'. He simply says, "the one who showed him mercy".

Jeffery Curtis Poor writes in 'rethinknow.org' that the lawyer... "was also following common teaching of the day. Rabbinic literature of the day made a clear distinction that your "neighbour" was only to include Israelites. What Jesus is about to do is expand the parameters of who his neighbour is. Far beyond where this lawyer, or any Jew, would be comfortable..."

Jesus was expanding the lawyer's understanding of theology. Not only was Jesus broadening the lawyer's understanding of "who" we are compelled to show love to, Jesus was also teaching the lawyer that knowledge of correct theology isn't enough. If your knowledge of the Scripture doesn't result in life transformation then it is useless.

John Piper writes, "The goal of Bible reading is not only that we would see God, but that we would also enjoy him. But more than that, we don't just want to see and savour God's glory privately within us – we want it to conform us to that glory, so that others can see and experience God's glory through us. This, then is the last goal of Bible reading; to be changed from one degree of glory to another, by beholding the glory of the Lord."

"gotquestions.org" shares that three takeaways from the parable are:

1. We are compelled to put aside prejudice in order to show love and compassion for each other

2. Our neighbour is anyone we encounter
3. Keeping all the law as a way of being saved is an impossible task, we need Jesus to save us

(If you want to read more from that site, follow this link:  
<https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-Good-Samaritan.html> )

### **Questions:**

- The expert in religious law initially asked a question about salvation, and Jesus takes him down the path of how we treat each other. What do you think Luke might be trying to convey in how our faith and our actions are connected?
- Where do you see the chasm between “knowing the Bible” and “following the Bible” in your life? What areas are hardest for you?
- If you were to re-write this parable for modern day situations, in our church setting, who would be the attacked man, who would be the people walking by, who would be the Samaritan, and where would you place yourself?

### **Enrichment Activity:**

- Make a list of 2 or 3 people in your social circle that might need some kindness and some care. They might not be lying on the side of a road after being robbed, but they might have been absent from their community for a while, or going through a loss, or sick, or just feeling low. The person does not have to be within your church community.
- Pray and ask God to lead you in a way to reach out and care for these 2 or 3 people. It doesn't have to be much, just obedience to what you feel God is asking of you.



# Luke Pt 3

## Cost of Discipleship

### (14: 25-35)

#### Luke 14:25-35

#### The Cost of Being a Disciple

25 A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, 26 “If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. 27 And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. 28 “But don’t begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? 29 Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. 30 They would say, “There’s the person who started that building and couldn’t afford to finish it!”

31 “Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counsellors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? 32 And if he can’t, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away.<sup>33</sup> So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own.

34 “Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavour, how do you make it salty again? 35 Flavourless salt is good neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. It is thrown away. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!”

## Reflection:

Jannine K. Brown writes, “We live in a market driven society, so it is not surprising that we feel the urge to “sell” Christianity in the marketplace of competing ideas and ways of life. Yet, when Christian mission is shaped toward the “sell” mentality, it more often than not becomes a “low-cost” and “low-risk” commodity. How else will we persuade others to receive the faith, if not by coming in with a lower or better offer? But is the Christian faith really a low-cost, low-risk endeavour?... In this passage, Luke’s Jesus calls people to a kind of discipleship that is not cheap (akin to Bonhoeffer’s aversion toward “cheap grace”), not easy, and not to be entered into without deep consideration of the consequences and costs. This passage speaks to the importance of loyalty and allegiance to Jesus over all other competing loyalties, including family, self-interest, and possessions...”

When we understand what Jesus is saying in this passage in light of what will eventually happen to him on the cross, we can get a better understanding of his meaning. Jesus pays our eternal debt through his death, but the expectation that he has is that we give him our heart’s fullest devotion. No partial, not “close to the top”, but that Jesus be supreme in our hearts and lives. I was a groomsman at a wedding and in the vows the groom promised, “I vow to love God before everyone, and to love you (his bride) before everyone else.” He was promising priorities, God first, then his wife, then everyone after that.

So, the cost of discipleship is not burning down relationships, but the cost of discipleship is priorities in their right order.

Dallas Willard wrote, “The entire point of this passage is that as long as one thinks anything may really be more valuable than fellowship with Jesus and his kingdom, one cannot learn from him.... What this passage...is about is clarity. It is not about misery or about some incredibly dreadful price that one must pay to be Jesus’ apprentice.... The point is simply that unless we clearly see the superiority of what we receive as his students [his disciples] over every other thing that might be valued, we cannot succeed in our discipleship to him.”

Although it seems like this passage has the potential to depressing, if understood properly, it is refreshing and life giving. Jesus is not asking people to do something he does not do himself and to forfeit everything of value in their life. Jesus is actually asking them to follow him in his own example of what he is preaching about, AND he is offering them something far greater than what they can obtain on their own on earth. He is offering eternal return in exchange for earthly allegiance.

True discipleship is not losing everything. It is putting Jesus first in everything. Whole of life discipleship. Jesus on the throne in every part of our lives.

### Questions:

- We are invited to examine all aspects of our life carefully and decide if the reward of eternal life in God's presence is more important than anything else. What comes to mind when you ask Jesus to help identify what priorities you have in your life?
- If you were explaining what a person who prioritising God first looked like to someone who had no idea about Christianity, how would you describe this "God-first person"? And following on from that, how well do you match this description?
- How many times does Luke mention Jesus using the phrase, "you cannot be my disciple"? What do you take from this repetition?
- Have you ever started something without counting the cost? How did that turn out for you?

### Enrichment Activity:

- Write down 3 major priorities in your life (non-church/faith priorities, I am talking "life", e.g. money, work, house, study...). I want you to describe what it looks like when that priority is in submission to the supremacy of Jesus.
- Spend some time quietly meditating on this song written by Father Jack Potter;

*'O Jesus, Thou hast promised to all who follow Thee,  
That where Thou art in glory there shall Thy servant be.  
And Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;  
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.'*

# Luke Pt 4

## The Prodigal Son

### (15:11-32)

#### Luke 15:11-32

#### Parable of the Lost Son

11 To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So, his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

13 “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

17 “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’

20 “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

22 “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.<sup>23</sup> And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast,<sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So, the party began.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, <sup>26</sup> and he asked one of the servants what was going on. <sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’

28 “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, <sup>29</sup> but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. <sup>30</sup> Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

31 “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

### **Reflection:**

If you want to know the background for Jesus telling this parable, look to Luke 15:1-2 and you will find Jesus being criticised by Pharisees for sharing meals with sinners. It was not deemed appropriate by Pharisees for a “godly person” to mingle with the “sinners” and it was enough for the Pharisees to hurl slander and accusations in Jesus’ direction.

This led Jesus to sharing three similar parables about lost things being found. The first parable was of the lost sheep, then the second was of the lost coin, and then finally we get to the third parable of the prodigal son.

This parable is simple enough for us to understand the picture of God the Father and us the lost child, yet as you spend more time understanding it you start to realise the depth of the teaching. A great short book to read is by Timothy Keller, 'The Prodigal God', that really unpacks this passage.

If your Life Group has time, I would recommend spending 37 minutes watching the first part of the video accompaniment of The Prodigal God study by Tim Keller. Follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1O2dTnEdHfc&list=P L-pUr7051VzHsVj8trO2-9Muh4euYMI7z&index=6>

or search, 'Prodigal God Video 01 – Church Information' on YouTube.

In its most basic form, we understand that we have a Heavenly who we have walked away from, whether by intent or ignorance, and that there needs to come a time that we realise the foolishness of our ways and return home back into a saving relationship with God.

An initial reading of the parable would have us planted firmly in the shoes of the lost son, a sinner who experiences distance between themselves and their father. We are the sinner who ran away, we are the one who makes poor choices, we are the

foolish child who needs to go back home to be saved from themselves.

We read about the father who is not just at home, but waiting at home and seeking out the lost son. A father who runs to greet the lost son and embraces him and draws him back into the home. The father restores the lost son's ability to call himself part of the family.

But there is also a second son who more often than not a church goer might find themselves finding similarities to. The second son finds himself upset about the return of the lost son and frustrated at the grace and kindness shown to someone who has so wronged the father. Someone who finds it hard to accept the faults of others while overlooking the sin in their own life. The second son struggles to embrace the lost son, and in turn becomes distanced from the father.

The son who is left out of the great feast with the Father is not determined by the "good" son or the "bad" son titles, but simply by which son was willing to accept the grace of the father. As D.A. Carson writes,

'There is more than one way to run away from God and defy him. But there is only one way back: God is so prodigal in his grace that he reaches out to humble and restore and receive both.'

A wonderful thing to notice and to remember is that the father appears to be eagerly and faithfully watching for the return of his son. Almost as if anticipating the event. Verse 20 reads, "But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Do we trust that God has a similar desire to see



us return to Him, to turn from our sins and foolishness and accept his grace and forgiveness?

Think of 2 Peter 3:9 in that he is “longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance.” As much as we look at this parable to discover ourselves in the sons, there is an even greater richness in seeing the character of God displayed in the heart and actions of the father.

### Questions:

- What do you think is at the heart of the prodigal son’s decisions to leave home? Put on your analytical hat and pull apart all the drivers at work in his life.
- How do we see ourselves motivated by similar forces?
- How do we respond to people who have hurt us and pushed us away? Do we respond like the father or the older son?
- If you were to choose one character that you feel like you understand a bit more, the prodigal younger son, the waiting and gracious father, the frustrated and bitter older son, which would you choose and explain your insights.

### Enrichment Exercise:

- The Prodigal Son might be viewed as an expansion of one of the proverbs of the Old Testament: Proverbs 29:3 states, 'Whoever loves wisdom gives joy to his father, but whoever consorts with harlots squanders his wealth.'

If you were to write a short proverb around this parable, what would it say. Keep it to a couple sentences at most. Spend some time writing up a value driven proverb to share with the group. It can focus on any of the three main characters.

# Luke Pt 5

## The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (16:1-9)

### Luke 16:1-9

#### Parable of the Shrewd Manager

16 Jesus told this story to his disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer’s money. 2 So the employer called him in and said, ‘What’s this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.’

3 “The manager thought to himself, ‘Now what? My boss has fired me. I don’t have the strength to dig ditches, and I’m too proud to beg. 4 Ah, I know how to ensure that I’ll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.’

5 “So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe him?’ 6 The man replied, ‘I owe him 800 gallons of olive oil.’ So the manager told him, ‘Take the bill and quickly change it to 400 gallons.’

7 “‘And how much do you owe my employer?’ he asked the next man. ‘I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,’ was the reply. ‘Here,’ the manager said, ‘take the bill and change it to 800 bushels.’

8 “The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light. 9 Here’s the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.

## Reflection:

For us to understand this curious parable it is important for us to know the audience to whom Jesus was speaking when he shared it. The initial target of his words were his disciples, but it isn't too much of a stretch to see the second audience being the Pharisees who listened in. Luke 14 is a commentary on the motivation of the Pharisees (lovers of money), with chapter 15 following that up with a condemnation of those motives, which then bleeds into chapter 16 that talks about a money-based parable.

The plot of the parable can be simply boiled down to this; the manager realises that he is about to be out of a job and will not survive if he has to make money any other way, so with a little thinking time he decides that his best course of action is to get in the good graces with all of the debtors who owe his boss money, and this way at least he will have offers for shelter and help. So, he starts making “shrewd” deals to get the debtors to pay out their remaining debt at a reduced amount, which carries good favour with the debtor, and to the manager's surprise also impresses his boss.

There are a couple learnings that we can take from this parable:

- 1- We need to understand that shrewdness can be incredibly useful
- 2- We need to be reminded that, just like the manager, we cannot take anything with us when we depart

So, the first learning. Shrewdness can be useful. In this parable the manager sees his master's resources as a means to further himself and to make his own life better (even though he seemingly does a good thing in helping other pay off debts). But there is a lesson in this for us in that we are stewards of goods and gifts from God. James 1:17 talks of every good and perfect gift coming from God. But Jesus would expect that we operate from a place of righteousness rather than selfishness. Rather than using all that God gives us as a means to further our own goals, we should look at all the resources, time, treasure, talents, as a means to further God's ultimate goal; the salvation and redemption of the world. Our shrewdness should not be in selfish gain, our shrewdness should be in using God's resources to the in the best possible way in order to expand God's kingdom and to live out His character.

*'gotquestions.org' writes a bit more about this, "Jesus then goes on to expand in verses 10–13 the principle given in verse 9. If one is faithful in "little" (i.e., "unrighteous" wealth), then one will be faithful in much. Similarly, if one is dishonest in little, he will also be dishonest in much. If we can't be faithful with earthly wealth, which isn't even ours to begin with, then how can we be entrusted with "true riches"? The "true riches" here is referring to stewardship and responsibility in God's kingdom along with all the accompanying heavenly rewards."*

Then the second learning, that just like the manager, we cannot take anything with us when we depart. Anyone who has reached adulthood would be able to attest that as much as we try and plan and control, at the end of the day we are not in charge of how things turn out. We plan, but we do not have control. And when we build up large savings, accrue properties, have the best insurance policies, go to the best schools, etc etc etc, we can start to feel quite secure in ourselves. The manager in the parable clearly had a great job, was making good money, and was responsible for a lot of things...but then one day it was decided that it would be taken from him. All gone. And he cannot take the job, the income, and the responsibilities with him.

One day all that we have accrued, saved, studied, invested, and bought will mean nothing for our own life, because we will depart from this life. We won't be able to take it with us. The shrewd manager (but also, let's be honest... he was a bit of a shady manager) realised at the last moment that he could use his position and resources to influence the people around him. He realised that his time was almost up and all the things that he had access to would no longer be at hand, and finally it dawned on him that the only thing that would continue on from his time working for his boss was the impact he could have on the people around him. So, he did everything he could in the last little while with his boss to impact people in a way that suited him.

There is a lesson to be taken from this for us. One day we will no longer have access to all the things that we have, one day our time serving "the boss" here on earth will be done, and all that will continue on, is the impact that we had on the people around us. How much time do we spend building our savings account, or our portfolio, or our degrees, and how much time

do we spend thinking about how this is going to impact the people around us, and whether we can use the resources given to us from God to serve the people around us. And spending time building into relationships is always a lot more fruitful than spending time building your treasures.

### Questions:

- Keeping in mind this is one of Jesus's most difficult parables to understand, what is your initial takeaway from reading through it?
- Matthew 6:21 has a warning about how much we care about resources, how do you feel this connects with this passage?
- Do you have examples of when you or someone you know was \*shrewd in a positive way?  
\*Clever/Wise/Strategic in how they used their resources?
- How much time do you think you spend planning to build your resources that you won't be able to take with you?
  - o Are there good examples of this? (e.g. leaving an inheritance for your family?)
  - o Are there bad examples of this? (e.g. spending so much time at work that you miss being present with you family?)
- Do you spend time thinking about the impact that you will leave behind? Do you think that your priorities reflect your values? Explain why or why not.

### **Enrichment Exercise:**

- Imagine you get to choose what impact your life has on someone else.
  - Make a list of two or three things that you get to influence on them.
  - Then write down things that you would need to be practicing or living out in your life now for those impacts to be realised.



# Luke Pt 6

## The Publican and the Sinner (18:9-14)

### Luke 18:9-14

#### Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector

9 Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone

else: 10 “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector.<sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! 12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ 14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

## Reflection:

All of Jesus's parables share kingdom truths, and all could be connected to the gospel in a very easy way, but there is something special about this parable in that it clearly states the Good News of Jesus Christ in such a short space.

Sure, Jesus is teaching His disciples about prayer. Sure, Jesus is speaking to His disciples and to those who trust in their own righteousness and viewed others with contempt. Sure, Jesus is talking about pride and humility.

But Jesus is also breaking down the basics of our inability to save ourselves through our own good words and righteousness, and our undeniable reliance on God to reach down and rescue the sinner.

Sinners who cannot save themselves, and a God who is willing to fix that problem.

We have to understand how provocative this parable is. Jesus had already been ruffling feathers with the way that he was subverting expectations, calling out the rich and powerful, by the way Jesus was uplifting the excommunicated and the outcast. Now Jesus was explicitly stating the problem with how the Pharisees went about their faith. This was not subtle. Jesus was calling them out on their pride and arrogance. Jesus is calling out the religious elite! We also have to understand that the Pharisees were not seen as bad people, in fact they were incredibly well respected and looked to for direction by the Jewish people. The Pharisees were the religious scholars that all the parents wish their kids grew up to be. But they had slowly lost their first love.

The Pharisees had become obsessed with their own goodness, they had become infatuated with their own status as the image of godliness. This was so much the case they had begun to have public ceremonies, created traditions that involved them, and took opportunities to show off that they were devoted to God as often as possible. In this story we see an example of that as the Pharisee separates himself from the crowd in order to be seen publicly praying. It has stopped becoming about the prayer and it was now all about the show.

‘thingsofthesort.com’ writes this observation of the two men: “When compared, the Pharisee is obviously the better person. We would want him as our neighbour. We would turn to him if we needed help. We wouldn’t mind walking by him on the street. The Tax Collector, on the other hand, is someone we’d avoid. We’d shudder to see him approaching our house. We’d disassociate ourselves with him. We often forget the difference between these two persons. Those of us who have heard so much bad about the Pharisees forget that many of them were the kinds of guys we’d want our kids to look up to. Make no mistake, the Pharisee was the good guy, the Tax Collector the bad guy.”

This lines up exactly with what we read in 1 Samuel 16:7, “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

But as we soak up the deep meanings of this parable, we get a wonderful picture of a Saviour who is not looking for the brightest and shiniest, we see a Saviour who is listening for the person calling out to God for rescue because that person knows they cannot help themselves. This parable not only breaks us

down, it gives us the invitation for us to be built back up. We are freed from needing to be more in order to be accepted; instead we are invited to just trust that God is able to give us what we need to be in a relationship with Him.

### Questions:

- We read in Matt 6:1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” What are our modern day versions of “practicing righteousness”? Have you found yourself caught in that trap?
- What areas do you find that pride has still found a home in your heart?
- Read the following Proverbs and choose one to re-word to make it more personal/current:
  - One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honour. ~ **Proverbs 29:23**
  - Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. ~ **Proverbs 16:18**
  - The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. ~ **Proverbs 8:13**
- Share with the group how you feel thinking about the tax collector. The sad, self-conscious man who did not even think himself worthy of talking to God, let alone expecting anything from God. How might we change our attitude towards people who walk through the doors of our church that might feel the same way?

### **Enrichment Exercise:**

- Spend time thinking of how deep the love God has for you must be, when we are all like the tax collector. Unworthy of righteousness and unable to save ourselves. Then as a group take time to share some short prayers expressing gratitude to God's kindness to us.