

LUKE BIBLE STUDY, PART ONE

Picture a scientist going about some great work. He or she is searching for the cure for some horrible disease, or making some marvelous new discovery. First the scientist digs for facts, looking deeply, studying carefully, investigating every clue, relentlessly hunting for any and every fact that will make the discovery deeper, richer, and more accurate.

That is the approach these studies will take with the Gospel of Luke's first 10 chapters. In these studies we are going to look at Jesus through the eyes of those who actually witnessed him, and then told their story. That is what a witness is: a person who sees or experiences something, and then tells others what he or she has seen. We are going to look at a wide and interesting variety of witnesses—witnesses who have experienced Jesus and share what they have seen. First, we'll look deeply at what they say, and then we'll draw our own conclusions.

These studies will use the inductive method, a way of looking into the text for the facts, then pondering what they mean, and then considering what they mean for our situation today. And what could be more important? One of the most profound things in life is to think about God, our relationship with God, and the meaning of life and truth. That is what we will be investigating in these studies as we look at these witnesses of Jesus and what they have to say to us.

Luke's Story

Luke is the author of this Gospel as well as the book of Acts. With these two books he actually wrote one fourth of the New Testament! Luke was the only Gentile New Testament writer and was a man of broad sympathies. He noticed and wrote about groups usually neglected by the cultures of his day: women, children, the sick, the poor, outcasts and foreigners. He points to Jesus' great interest in all kinds of people. Luke was also an educated man, a doctor and a historian. And, like the scientist described above, he was very careful with his facts, describing incidents with historical accuracy and using a rich vocabulary. His reporting is orderly and accurate.

The Gospel of Luke is a fascinating account of Jesus and those who witnessed his life. Luke does not present the facts about Jesus as a statistical report but as a story. He tells in an interesting, accurate and reliable way the story of Jesus and what that story means for us. May God give your small group rich and rewarding insights as you study his Word together!

Notes for the Discussion Leader

You can help your group get the most out of these studies by presenting some guidelines for effective discussion just before you get into the passage. Here are some you can mention:

- Approach the Bible as you would any good primary source: be open to learn.
- Let the text speak for itself rather than depending on something you've heard or read about it.
- Expect the text, rather than the leader, to answer questions that come up.
- Stay in the passage. On occasion, when background information is necessary, the study guide may refer the group to another passage. But that is the only time to go out of the passage. Don't go off on tangents into different passages.
- Stay on the point under discussion.
- Keep in mind that each person's part in the discussion helps the group to learn more. People who talk easily in discussion can make space for quieter people to contribute also. God can use what each one says to help the rest of us. And we can honor each other by listening to each other.

The second time the group meets, it may be helpful to run lightly over these guidelines again.

The questions in this guide are for your use in preparing and leading. (*Note: Helpful leader's notes are in italics throughout the guide.*) Put the questions into your own words if you'd like, yet try to stay within the intent of each question. Become so familiar with the questions that you won't be looking down at your page all the time. Have your own written responses handy as you lead the study. Since the questions are based on the construction of the passage, they will lead the group to major teachings. Decide how much discussion time each group of questions is worth. This will help you pace the discussion.

Make sure that each study ends with one or two questions of application, even if that means watching the clock and leaving out a few of the suggested questions. Begin and end the study on time.

Note: It is easier for study and discussion if everyone has the same version of the Bible. The New International Version (NIV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), or the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) are good and popular versions of the Bible, and any one of them would be accurate and reliable to use together. The questions in these studies are based on the NRSV text.

Throughout the series of discussions, pray for the members of your group—that they'll be prepared and open for the study-discussion, and that God would speak powerfully to them as they dig into his Word together.

LUKE 1:1-4: LUKE, THE INVESTIGATIVE WITNESS

Getting Started

Before we dig into the Gospel of Luke, it's important to reflect on our own stories in relation to Jesus. All of us, no matter what our backgrounds and experiences, have a story about our knowledge of and relationship with Jesus. Even those of us from non-religious or non-Christian backgrounds have some thoughts and opinions about Jesus. They may be warm, indifferent, or angry opinions. That's okay. We want to establish an accepting, open atmosphere where we listen to each other and grow together.

Take some time now to share your own stories or thoughts about Jesus and your relationship with him at this point in your life. *(Note: You can give significant time to this sharing, as the rest of this first study is relatively short.)*

1. Turn to Luke's own introduction to his Gospel, Luke 1:1-4. Have someone read the passage as everyone follows along. From these four verses, what do you learn about the Gospel of Luke? What do they tell us about its historical accuracy?
2. Trace through these verses how the "events that were fulfilled among us" came to be written down into "orderly accounts." What process did the writers go through?
3. Who do you think some of these "eyewitnesses" might be? What does Luke say about the others who have written accounts?
4. In verse 3 Luke tells us he wrote to Theophilus. What can we learn about Theophilus from the text? Why did Luke write to him?
5. How do you think Luke's emphasis on talking to eyewitnesses and writing an orderly account will help you as you study his Gospel in the coming weeks?
6. Suppose Luke just came in the door of your room and told you excitedly about his investigation. He's been talking to eyewitnesses about Jesus and putting together an orderly account. What would you like him to investigate, to find out about Jesus? What should he find out from the eyewitnesses? Share some of the questions you come up with, and keep them in mind in the coming weeks to see if Luke gives you any answers.

In Closing

What is it that you would most like to learn or experience about Jesus in the coming weeks? *(You may want to spend some time in prayer as a group asking Jesus to reveal himself to you in deep and powerful ways.)*

LUKE 1:26-38: GABRIEL, THE HEAVENLY WITNESS

Getting Started

Think of something great. What does “great” mean to you? Share your ideas.

In this passage, a heavenly visitor comes to Mary and proclaims that she will miraculously bear a child, and that he will be great. Let’s see what greatness is for Jesus as we delve into this famous passage.

1. Have someone read this text aloud with the rest following along. Verse 26 gives us a “when,” a time indicator. Look back to verses 5-24 to find out what happened six months earlier.
2. What do we learn about Joseph in verse 27? Why do you think this might be significant? How is Mary described?
3. How does the angel encourage Mary in verses 28-31? Have you ever experienced God’s grace or favor in an unusual way? Talk about it. How did it feel? How did you respond?
4. In verse 32 Gabriel says that Jesus will be “great.” Then he describes four things that Jesus will be or have or do. What are they? What do these four things have in common? *(They all have to do with kingship or kingdoms: “Son of the Most High,” “give him the throne of . . . David,” “reign over the house of Jacob,” “of this kingdom there will be no end.”)*
5. Our concept of kingship these days is pretty shallow, mostly centering around the foibles of the British royal family or a certain king buried in Graceland. What power did kings have in the ancient world? What would it mean to have a king whose kingdom would never end?
6. What does it mean for us today that Jesus is a king, an eternal king, whose kingdom will never end? Where do you think his kingdom is today? How might this change or enlarge your concept of Jesus? How does it honestly make you feel about him?
7. What progression do you see in Mary’s responses in verses 29, 34, and 38? How does Gabriel answer her question about how this could happen (verses 35-37)? Have you ever experienced going from confusion to questioning to faith? What was the situation?
8. What do you think the angel’s statement in verse 37 meant for Mary? What could it mean for you today?

In Closing

In this story, Gabriel gives an announcement, a word from God, and describes Jesus as the great King. Mary responds, after some perplexity and questioning, with faith in this word. What does it mean for you to live by faith in the Word? What would this faith look like? What practical small step of faith could you take this week, based on God's Word?

LUKE 2:1-20: ANGELS AND SHEPHERDS: JOYFUL WITNESSES

Getting Started

When have you experienced *good news*? Think of a time you received good news and share a little about it. In this passage we will read about some good news brought by heavenly messengers to some unlikely witnesses. We'll ponder what it means that Jesus is "good news."

1. Have three people read the passage, with each one reading a paragraph (the paragraphs are verses 1-7, 8-14, and 15-20). (*Note: For some in the group, even the first few words ["In those days a decree went out . . ."] may bring back memories of trees, lights, presents, or a midnight Mass or service with the family. But a key to inductive Bible study is to approach the text in a fresh way as if one had never seen it before. This may be hard, but urge the group to try.*)

2. In the first few verses, what are some clues that the historian Luke is trying to be painfully accurate with his political and historical facts? Why do you think he mentions Roman emperors and governors—people of power?

3. In verses 4-7, what new things do we learn about Joseph and Mary? What facts about them are repeated from our study in Luke 1:26-38? Put yourself in the drama. How would you feel, trudging over 100 miles because some occupation government officials wanted you to register so they could tax you and, if you are a man, possibly draft you into their army? Look again at verse 7. What different emotions might Joseph and Mary have experienced?

4. Shepherds were poor, lower-class people in their society, despised by religious Jews because their work kept them away from many religious activities. Looking at verses 8-14, why do you think God chose shepherds to be the first ones to hear the good news of the birth of Jesus?

5. In verse 10, the angel talks about "good news of great joy for all people." Look carefully at the three ways Jesus is described in verse 11. What are they? (*Savior, Messiah [or Christ], Lord.*) What would each of these have meant for poor Jewish shepherds under Roman occupation in the first century? Take time to ponder what each description means to us today. Why is this announcement by the angel good news?

6. Notice the contrast between these majestic titles for Jesus and the poor situation into which he was born in verses 6-7. Why do you think Luke emphasizes this contrast?

7. What is the reaction in heaven to the birth of Jesus according to verses 13-14? What is a benefit to those on earth? "On earth peace among those whom he favors" is a different translation from the one in our traditional Christmas carols, but it is more accurate. What do you think it means?
8. After the angels leave, in verses 15-16, what do the shepherds do? What have they become? (*Witnesses! Someone who sees and then tells.*)
9. What is the shepherds' first act after seeing and experiencing Jesus (verse 17)? Think back to the time when you experienced good news in your life. Did you want to tell others about the good thing? If we truly experience Jesus in our lives, and thus become "witnesses" to his truth as the shepherds were, how might we respond?

In Closing

Again, put yourself into the passage. What feelings do you think Mary experienced in this passage? What feelings did the shepherds experience? Note that the shepherds left glorifying and praising God (verse 20). Is there anything in your life or experience right now for which you can praise God? Is there anything you are thankful for? (*Note: You may want to end the study by sharing some things each person is thankful for, and then spending time in prayer praising and thanking God.*)

LUKE 2:22-40: SIMEON AND ANNA: PATIENT, FAITHFUL WITNESSES

Getting Started

What do you want to be like at the end of your life? What do you want to have accomplished? You may not have done a lot of thinking about this, but take a few moments to share some preliminary thoughts.

In this study we are going to look at two older people whose lives ended well. They seemed to know how to live life with power and meaning. Let's look at their "witness" to Jesus.

1. Have someone (or a few people) read Luke 2:22-40 aloud. Verses 22-35 are about Simeon, and verses 36-40 about Anna.
2. Verses 1-21 of this chapter describe the birth and circumcision of Jesus. Now it is time for his "presentation." How is this ceremony described in verses 22-24? Leviticus 12:6-8 in the Old Testament describes the origin of this purification ceremony. From the Leviticus passage and verse 24 we get a clue to the economic status of Mary and Joseph. What was it?
3. Look carefully at how Simeon is described in verse 25. Do you know anyone like this, who seems to have "the Holy Spirit resting on" them? Share a bit about them. What makes them special?
4. How do you think Simeon felt when he saw Jesus?
5. Now look at his "song" in verses 29-32. What does he say about the salvation that is brought by Jesus? Who were the "Gentiles"? (*Everyone who was not Jewish.*) If this "light of revelation" that Jesus will bring is for the Gentiles, and also for the glory of Israel, what is Simeon really saying about the revelation of Jesus?
6. Look at Simeon's further prophecy in verses 34-35. Why do you think there will be opposition to someone bringing the revelation of God? What do you think he meant when he said to Mary that "a sword will pierce your own soul"?
7. How is Anna described in verses 36-37? Do you know any older people who are very godly, who seem to worship God with genuine power? Share a bit about them.
8. In verse 38, as soon as Anna saw Jesus, what are two things she does immediately in response? How is this similar to the shepherds' response in verses 17 and 20? What seems to be the first thing people do when they truly encounter Jesus? Have you encountered Jesus in such a way—one that would make you want to tell others about him?

9. Compare Simeon and Anna. What did they have in common? What was their response to encountering Jesus?

In Closing

What characterizes those who genuinely seek Jesus? What do they seem to do as soon as they encounter him? How do the examples of these two people help you as you think about living your life meaningfully until the very end?

LUKE 3:1-20: JOHN THE BAPTIST: THE FIERY WITNESS

Getting Started

Think for a minute about fire. Have you ever experienced a fire? What good things does fire do? What harmful things does it do?

The Gospel of Luke is set in the first century. The nation of Israel is living under the heavy hand of Rome and is rife with internal difficulties as well. A man appears on the scene whose life affects many people. He is a fiery man, and he speaks of fire in many different ways. This man is of such character and influence that some think he may be the Messiah. He is not. But he is a significant person in the history of Christianity. His name is John.

1. Ask everyone to read Luke 3:1-20 for themselves, and then have the group members mention things that impress them about John's ministry.
2. As you look more closely at the first two verses, what do they contribute to the passage? Why do you think Luke includes this kind of information? History shows that Herod and some of the other people listed here were known to be morally and spiritually degenerate. What is the source of their authority as leaders? How does it compare with John's?
3. We're introduced to John's work in verse 3. What was it? What does it mean to repent? *(To repent means to be genuinely sorry for sin and to turn from it to obey God resolutely. Sin means living independently of God, failing to trust him. It is more than just bad morals.)* When people came to be baptized by John, they confessed their sin and made a "U-turn" toward God. John then baptized them. Therefore, what did John's baptism mean? *(When John baptized people, this symbolized a radical cleansing of their lives and desire to change direction and turn toward God in faith and trust.)*
4. In verses 4-6, Luke quotes from the prophet Isaiah to help us understand more about John's ministry. Look carefully at the picture Isaiah paints and dig out the facts there. What do you think this is describing? *(This is a picture of a Middle Eastern king and his herald. In those days, when a ruler took a journey, a servant or herald was sent ahead of him. This herald warned the people of the land to prepare the roadway through the wilderness for the arrival of the king. Holes in the road had to be filled, bumps and high places leveled, crooked sections straightened, and rough spots smoothed.)* How is John a herald for "King" Jesus? What did it mean for John to make crooked places straight and the rough ones smooth? What does this have to do with repentance?
5. The next paragraph, verses 7-9, tells us that a great number of people are coming to John for baptism. How does the text explain why John is so stern with them? What would

be a contemporary way of saying, “I’m okay. I have Abraham as my father”? How does John confront this kind of complacency?

6. As you look at the dialogue in verses 10-14, what do you find out about these people? What are they like in everyday life? What is John emphasizing about genuine repentance? *(It has a practical, social context—repentance has to do with social justice!)* What would practical repentance look like for us today?

7. According to verse 15, what is the atmosphere of the crowd and the situation? From verses 15-17, what do you learn about John?

8. What does John make clear about Christ in verses 15-17? What is surprising about this picture of the Messiah? How do you respond to this? How would the baptism by Jesus be different from the baptism by John? How would its effects be different in your everyday life? *(The baptism by John was only preparatory. The baptism by Jesus is real and permanent, and has the powerful meaning that the Holy Spirit is truly there—that God is with us and in us.)*

9. In verse 18 John’s preaching is called good news. How is this word of a coming judge who will baptize with fire good news? How did he respond to this and other things John said?

10. According to John’s fiery witness, who is Jesus? What do you think of the Jesus presented here, and in Luke so far?

In Closing

John the Baptist talked about making the crooked straight and rough places smooth. What might be some “crooked” or “rough” places in your life? What would repentance mean to you in light of this study? What would it mean for you to repent in this way?

LUKE 4:16-30: THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE

Getting Started

What do you really think of the Bible? What is it to you? Is it a mysterious holy book? A book only priests or scholars can interpret? Is it a bunch of myths? Good moral teaching? Just the words of people? The Word of God? (*Note: You can have a lively discussion if people share honestly!*)

In this study we are going to see Jesus' attitude toward the Bible of his day—what we call the Old Testament. We'll see how he took it as an authoritative witness to himself and gave his audience a radical twist on its interpretation.

1. Review the section that comes just before our passage, the story of the temptation of Jesus and how he defeated Satan by quoting from Scripture. Then have someone or a few people read the study passage, Luke 4:16-30.
2. Take some time to share all the facts you see in verses 16-17. What is the special designation given to Nazareth? What do these verses imply about Jesus' attendance at synagogue services?
3. The tradition in the synagogues of Jesus' day was not to have a regular minister/preacher for each synagogue, but rather to have the Scripture read and discussed. Often a distinguished visitor was asked to read the Scripture and comment on it. Why do you think Luke put such an emphasis on Jesus' reading of this Scripture in Isaiah?
4. The Scripture Jesus read, verses 18-19, is a quote from Isaiah 61:1-2. As Jesus applies this to himself, what was he anointed by the Spirit to do? Who are the four groups of people mentioned here? What do they all have in common? Look carefully at each one and ponder what it means:
 - What is the good news that is going to the poor?
 - Who are the captives that will be released? What do you think this meant for the people of that time? What does it mean for us in our time?
 - Who are the blind, then and now?
 - Who are the oppressed, then and now? What would freedom mean for them?
5. Verse 19 is a quote from Isaiah but also alludes to Leviticus 25:10, which describes the Year of Jubilee, an every-50-year festival of freedom, worship, and economic justice. What do you think the "year of the Lord's favor" is that Jesus is going to proclaim?

6. Looking again at verses 18-19 as a whole, how is Jesus defining his mission? Why do you think he stresses that the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed will be the focus of his ministry? What does this say to people who feel that the purpose of Christians is to “save souls” and not worry about social needs?

7. After the reading, Jesus applies it all to himself. What is he saying in his one-sentence sermon in verse 21?

8. How do his hearers respond in verse 22? Jesus then confronts them with some very sharp words. In verses 23-24, what is Jesus saying about the people’s real response to him, in their hearts, underneath their kind words? What does this say about our response to him?

9. In verses 25-27, Jesus is referring to two Old Testament stories (1 Kings 17:1-24 and 2 Kings 5:1-14) that would be familiar to the people then but are not so familiar to us. Look closely at the two people who receive ministry: the widow at Zarephath in Sidon in verse 26, and Naaman the Syrian leper in verse 27. What do they have in common? (*They were both Gentiles.*) Does this give you a clue as to why Jesus’ Jewish hometown listeners were so mad? The Jewish people at the time felt that they were the special objects of God’s love. What does this say about the scope of God’s love? In verses 18-19 and 25-27, for whom does God seem to have a special preference?

10. Jesus took very seriously the authority of the Scripture of his day, and its witness to him. What did the combined witness of all of the Old Testament Scriptures mentioned in this passage say about Jesus? Who is he, and what is his mission? What in this passage was surprising or intriguing for you? Why?

In Closing

How does the emphasis on Jesus’ love for sinners, the outcast, and the blind apply to you? What does it say about the priorities his people should operate by? Who are the poor, captive, blind, or oppressed people on your campus or living near you? What can your group do to show Jesus’ love to them?

LUKE 5:1-11: SIMON PETER: A HUMBLLED WITNESS

Getting Started

In what areas of your life do you feel confident or experienced or affirmed by others? In what part of your life do you think you can handle things fairly well by yourself?

In this study we will look at a person who was a true professional, someone who could handle things by himself—and yet who, in the context of his profession, learned some amazing things about Jesus.

1. Ask someone who enjoys reading to read the passage aloud, and dramatically. Everyone else should follow along and notice as much as they can about the scene.
2. As you look at the first five verses, put yourself in the scene. Pretend this is a movie. Who is there? What sounds do you hear? What do you smell? What are your visual impressions? *(Note: Simon [also called Simon Peter and later just Peter], James, and John have known Jesus for a year, but are not yet his disciples. The Lake of Gennesaret is another name for the Lake of Galilee, a harp-shaped lake 13 miles long and 6-to-7 miles across, circled by gently rolling hills.)*
3. Why do you think Jesus gets into the boat? *(Open water is a natural amplifier for sound.)*
4. In verse 4, how does the scene change? If you were Simon, how would you be feeling? What would be on your mind? Consider what Jesus says to him in verse 4. What difficulties would an experienced fisherman have with this suggestion? *(Night is often the best time for fishing and shallow areas are the best places.)* What do you notice in Simon's response in verse 5? What feelings and conflicts is Peter expressing?
5. Look at verses 6-7. What words and phrases in these verses indicate the size of the catch? Why is the size of the catch significant?
6. What is Simon's reaction in verse 8? Is this what you would expect? From his reaction, what do you think he perceives about Jesus? What does he perceive about himself? Why do you think he says he is a sinful man? Why is this an especially strong experience for Simon (being a fisherman)? What does his response say about who Jesus is? What does this say about who we are?
7. What might Jesus be saying to you about an area of your life where you feel confident, or perhaps over-confident? What might he be saying to you about what trust in him means, or what faith is?

8. Notice the way Jesus responds to Simon in verse 10. How might he have responded? “You will be catching people” (King James Version: “I will make you fishers of men”) is a famous phrase. What do you think it meant to Simon Peter? What does it mean for you? Why does Jesus say this to Simon now, rather than saying it earlier?

9. James and John have watched this whole thing. What might have gone through their minds as Jesus made the suggestion to Simon about putting out into the deep?

10. How does the story end, in verse 11? If you had been one of these three fishermen, what characteristics of Jesus would have led you to leave everything to follow him? What do they learn in this experience that they’ll need in the work they’ll be doing from now on?

In Closing

What does it really mean to follow Jesus? How has Jesus shown his trustworthiness to be followed? What did it mean for Peter, James, and John? What does it mean for you? Is there anything holding you back from freely following Jesus?

Or, summarize Simon’s story (learning of Jesus, being skeptical of his command, following his word, seeing power demonstrated, repenting, being called to deeper service). In what ways are these elements present in our stories—our spiritual journeys?

LUKE 7:1-10: THE ROMAN CENTURION: A GENTLE WITNESS

Getting Started

Faith is a word that we hear a lot. How would you define it? In this study we are going to take a fresh look at what faith is, and what faith in Jesus means in a practical way, through the witness of a Roman soldier. The setting is the Jewish town of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has just finished teaching about practical obedience (6:46-49). He is now interacting with a person in a crisis.

1. Have someone read aloud Luke 7:1-10. Ask the group to be noticing the different kinds of people involved in this experience.
2. Looking at the first five verses, what is interesting about how the centurion approaches Jesus?
3. This centurion is part of the Roman occupation army in Israel at the time. He had authority over 100 men. How do the people in an occupied country usually feel about the occupying army? How is this centurion unusual? Why do you think he would ask for help from Jesus? Why would he involve elders of the Jews?
4. Which words and phrases in verses 4 and 5 indicate the regard of the Jewish leaders for the centurion? Why do you think Jesus goes with them?
5. Consider the centurion's request in verse 3. Then look at his request in verses 6 and 7. What is the difference in the two requests? Why do you think he changes what he asks?
6. Why do you think there is a contrast between the elders' view of the centurion (verse 4) and the centurion's view of himself (verse 6)? How is he showing trust in Jesus in verse 7?
7. Contrast the authority of the centurion and Jesus in terms of origin and extent (verses 7 and 8).
8. In what ways does Jesus respond to the centurion's faith in him? How are the different people in this account affected by Jesus' response?
9. What evidences of true faith do you find in the centurion, from the start of the passage on through? What does this true faith look like in this passage? How is it expressed?

In Closing

What are some ways we can show true, practical faith in Jesus' care and authority? What can we trust him for this week, and how can we demonstrate our trust?

Looking back over the studies we have done so far, how has your view of who Jesus is and what it means to have faith in him grown or changed?

LUKE 7:36-50: THE FORGIVEN WOMAN, A LOVING WITNESS

Getting Started

Tell about a time in your life when you were incredibly thankful and relieved.

Jesus has been performing great miracles before the people, and teaching with great authority. One day, he accepts a dinner invitation into an astute citizen's household, and surprising things happen!

1. Have someone read Luke 7:36-50. In verses 36-39, how is the woman described? Look carefully at what she does. What different emotions does she express here? How do you think she feels about herself? What would motivate this woman to crash a dinner party, bring this expensive gift, and weep before Jesus?
2. What might we learn here about approaching Jesus?
3. In verse 39, how does Simon, the host, react to this uninvited guest? How do you think he feels about himself? How does he feel about Jesus? (Notice also the deference he gives Jesus in verse 40.)
4. Jesus responds to Simon with a story in verses 40-43. Notice all the facts. What is the point of the story? What is the significance of the creditor's canceling the debts?
5. Notice the interesting turn that Jesus takes toward Simon in verses 44-47. How is Simon different from the woman? How is she better than he is? Who do you think is the worse sinner here, the woman or Simon? (*Note: This is not an easily answered question. There should be quite a bit of discussion since there are good arguments on both sides.*)
6. In verse 47, what is the response that Jesus wants in those whom he forgives? Do you think this characterizes the lives of those who are believers in Jesus, forgiven by him? Does it characterize your life?
7. What is significant about Jesus' words in verse 48? Since only God can forgive sins, and Jesus forgave sins, what is he saying about himself? How do the guests respond (verse 49)?
8. How do you think the woman felt in verse 50? How has she shown faith? According to the witness of this woman, what is true faith in Jesus?
9. With which person in this story do you most identify, and why?

In Closing

Go over again the woman's steps to commitment and faith (*deep repentance, love for Jesus, unabashed and almost wasteful commitment to him, faith put in him, sins forgiven*). Have you ever made a deep commitment of faith in Jesus like this woman? If not, what prevents you from doing that?

Or, many students have difficulty believing that Jesus really loves them. If you are in that situation, what barriers do you feel are hindering you from accepting Jesus' love? Perhaps pride like Simon's? Or perhaps fear, or broken trust? What would help you to begin breaking through these barriers and accepting the love Jesus has for you? (Offer the group some extra time to think through these issues. Allow those who wish to share their thoughts to do so.)

Or, the response that Jesus wants from those he forgives is love (verse 47). What would it mean for you to love Jesus the way this woman did? Does this love characterize your life? Your group's life? How can you demonstrate love this week?

LUKE 9:18-27: THE WITNESS OF PETER AND THE DISCIPLES

Getting Started

Picture yourself before a really big exam. What do you feel like? What is going on in your head?

Jesus has been ministering with his disciples for a few years. They have seen his mighty acts, heard his powerful words. Now it is time for the big test. Would they know and understand who he really is? Would they present a proper “witness” of what they have seen and heard? This passage is a hinge point in Luke. After this Jesus “sets his face toward Jerusalem,” where he knows he will die (verse 51).

1. Have someone read Luke 9:18-27. In verse 18, what does Jesus ask to get the disciples thinking? Why do you think he asked a general question before his next very personal and very specific question in verse 20?
2. Why do you think people would have thought Jesus was John the Baptist? How would he have reminded people of Elijah? Why do you think they thought that in Jesus one of the ancient prophets had arisen?
3. Look at Peter’s answer in verse 20. What do you think his own words meant to him? What do they mean for us today?
4. Since Peter answered the question correctly, one would assume Jesus would breathe a sigh of relief and then commend Peter and the other disciples. But what does Jesus do in verse 21? Why do you think he did this? How does the fact that he must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and rise again explain why the disciples couldn’t tell the world that he is the Messiah at that point? (*Remember that he still had a year or so of ministry to go.*)
5. Verses 23-26 are a profound summary of what it means to be a follower of Jesus—a disciple, one who learns from a teacher. What are three things in verse 23 that one must do to become his follower? What do each of these mean for us today?
6. What do you think Jesus means by “lose their life for my sake” in verses 24-25? How does this “save” our lives?
7. What does he not want his followers to be, in verse 26? What would be the positive opposite of being ashamed of him? Have you had opportunities recently to share what you have experienced of him? How have you felt about the witness that you shared?

8. The exact meaning of verse 27 is controversial. What do you think he meant by “seeing the kingdom of God”? (*Some scholars think that the next incident, the transfiguration, helps fulfill this promise, as does his resurrection, the Spirit coming at Pentecost, etc.*)
9. From this passage, what does it mean for you to be a follower of Jesus?

In Closing

During our 10 weeks of study, we have looked at a number of “witnesses” to Jesus, each of whom told us something about him. That is what a witness is, someone who has seen something and then tells what they have seen or encountered. Quickly review each of the witnesses (*perhaps write them on a whiteboard or easel*) and consider what they said about Jesus. What did they have in common, and how were they different?

Who was your favorite witness, and why?

How have you grown and changed in your knowledge of and relationship to Jesus during this time? What impresses you about him? How have you experienced him during these studies? How are you going to respond?

LUKE BIBLE STUDY, PART TWO

This is the second in a series of three small-group Bible study discussion guides (Luke 1-9, Luke 10-24, and selected portions of Acts) that explore the meaning of “witness.” The goal is simply to strengthen believers as witnesses to the work and life of Jesus, both in history and in their lives. The Gospel of Luke is a fascinating account of Jesus and those who witnessed his life, and Luke tells the story of Jesus—and what that story means for us—in an interesting, accurate, and reliable way. May God give your small group rich and rewarding insights as you study his Word together!

LUKE 10:1-24: THE 70: WITNESSES ON A MISSION

Getting Started

Picture yourself volunteering to go on a mission trip with your church or fellowship. Why would you go? How would you prepare? What would you say to those whom you'd meet?

In this passage, Jesus is on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem and has just taught about true discipleship and the kingdom of God. Some of those who heard him and want to follow him are about to be sent out on a mission. In this study we'll explore what it is like to be a witness sent on a mission.

1. Read Luke 10:1-24. In verses 1-12, what do we learn about the 70 followers and the purpose of their mission? How are they to prepare? What is their message? How will their needs be met? (*Note: Some ancient authorities say 72. Whatever the number, the point is that they were sent ahead of Jesus.*)
2. What do you think Jesus means in verse 3 when he says that he sends them out "like lambs in the midst of wolves"? How can you relate to this metaphor? What are your feelings as you seek to be a witness on campus?
3. In verses 3-7, what is Jesus trying to teach about being witnesses?
4. What does "the kingdom of God" mean in verses 9 and 11? How is it that the kingdom of God comes near? (*Note: The kingdom is the reign or rule of God in the lives of people.*)
5. In verses 10-12 and 13-16, Jesus speaks of rejection. How are these 70 to deal with the rejection they will receive? What or whom are these inhospitable people ultimately rejecting?
6. Verses 17-20 recount the return of those who were sent out. How do they describe their mission experience? What are they excited about? How does Jesus respond to their report?
7. What is to be the source of the disciples' joy? Why? What is the source of Jesus' joy (verses 21-22)? How do we come to know the Father?
8. In a private word to the disciples (verses 23-24), Jesus talks about what they have seen and heard. They were witnesses. What did they see and hear?

In Closing

In what situations is Jesus calling you to bear witness to the nearness of the kingdom of God? What will it mean for you to respond to his call? In what can you rejoice?

LUKE 11:53-12:12: AUTHENTIC AND HYPOCRITICAL WITNESSES

Getting Started

You've heard it said, "Churches are full of hypocrites." Why is this accusation so common? Could someone accuse you of being hypocritical?

Earlier in Luke 11, Jesus upbraided the Pharisees and experts in the Law for their callous and self-centered attitudes, saying they are actually opposing, rather than serving, God. The battle lines are drawn as our passage begins.

1. Read Luke 11:53-12:12. Verses 53-54 set the tone for this passage. What words indicate how the Pharisees and teachers feel about Jesus? Describe the scene in 12:1. (*Note: It was dangerous to gather large crowds during this period of Roman occupation.*)

2. Jesus first warns about the Pharisees. What is "hypocrisy"? How is their hypocrisy like yeast?

3. Find the contrasts in verses 2-3. What is Jesus saying about secretive acts? Who is the "you" of verse 3? How might these people—and we ourselves—feel about personal secrets being revealed?

4. Next Jesus teaches about fear (verses 4-5). According to Jesus, who is the only one worthy of fear? Why? What do verses 6-7 add about God's character, authority, and care? (*Note: Sparrows were cheap food for the poor.*)

5. According to verses 8-12, what does Jesus promise to those who "acknowledge" him before others? What does it mean to you to acknowledge Jesus before others? How is this being a "witness"?

6. What might cause a person to deny Jesus before others (verse 9)?

7. Verse 10 indicates that there is forgiveness for those who may speak against Jesus, yet not for those who "blaspheme against the Holy Spirit." What is the difference? (*Note: To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit does not mean, as some students fear, a single act of sin or letting a bad word or two about the Holy Spirit slip out. It means consistently denying the Holy Spirit's power working in Jesus [see Luke 11:15-16 for an example of this]. It means to say an eternal "no!" to Jesus, to deny that he is Lord, Savior, and God. By definition, a believer committed to Jesus as Lord, Savior, and God in daily life has not committed this blasphemy.*)

8. This section indicates that successive generations of believers in Jesus will inherit the battle against hypocritical authorities. What does Jesus promise when we are forced to be witnesses before rulers and authorities? What is our responsibility?

In Closing

Who are the rulers and authorities in your daily life? Describe a situation you are in right now in which you must acknowledge Jesus before others. How might you handle it? Take time to pray for one another.

LUKE 15:1-2, 11-32: THE PRODIGAL SON: WITNESS AS STORY

Getting Started

Think of a time when someone extended grace to you: they could have blamed you or shamed you but they didn't. They gave you love and understanding when you deserved something else. How did it feel? This is the story of a father's grace that witnesses to God's grace in Jesus.

1. Read the passage aloud. Take a look at verses 1-2, which set the scene for all the stories in the chapter. What is Jesus doing, and why are the Pharisees and teachers of the law upset about it? How do they show their disgust? (*"Grumbling."*)

2. In answer to their grumbling, Jesus tells three stories about people or things that are lost and then found, and about the joy that comes when one sinner repents. We are going to look at the third story, about a father and his son, starting at verse 11.

In verses 11-12, what does the young son ask for? How does he ask? (*Demandingly! Note: Scholars say that asking for one's inheritance before one's father has died was unusual in that society, and was quite arrogant and rude.*)

3. How does the father respond in verse 12b? How do you think he feels?

4. Now look at the description of the son's adventures in verses 13-16. What words in that paragraph describe the fact that he is really a "sinner"? (*Note the words "squandered," "dissolute [wild, riotous] living," "feeding pigs." Look also at verse 30.*) For a Jewish person, what is especially sinful and disgusting about what he does in verses 15-16? (*Pigs were "unclean" animals, and God had forbidden the Jews to eat pork.*) According to verse 16, what effect is the son's wasteful, sinful lifestyle finally having on him?

5. In verses 17-20, what words and phrases describe what repentance is for this young man? (*"He came to himself" [or, "he came to his senses"]; a verbal acknowledgment of his sin in verse 18; an awareness of his unworthiness in verse 19; "set off and went" in verse 20.*) How do your observations describe what true repentance is? (*Seeing one's sin, seeing one's unworthiness, confessing sin, turning away from sin.*)

6. Look at the father's reaction in verse 20. What clues do you find that show the father has been waiting for his son's return? (*"But while he was still far off, his father saw him . . ."*) In verses 20-24, what strong, emotional words do you see that describe an extravagant welcome? What did the son do to deserve such a wonderful welcome? Why did the father welcome him like this?

7. Jesus' answer to the grumbling Pharisees and teachers is found in verses 25-32. In some ways the older brother in this story represents them. How does the older brother respond to this wonderful, undeserved welcome? What does the father say in return? Along with verses 7 and 10, how is this an answer from Jesus to the Pharisees who opposed his welcoming of sinners?

In Closing

Think again about the loving father. How does he show God's grace? (*Watching for his son to come back, throwing his arms around him in welcoming love, asking for nothing in return in order to earn or keep his love.*) Put yourself in the son's place. How does it feel to have the heavenly Father hugging you, enclosing you in his loving arms, even though you don't deserve it?

LUKE 18:35-43: THE BLIND MAN: A GRATEFUL WITNESS

Getting Started

Have you ever received a product or service so good that you enjoyed telling people about it and encouraged them to get it too? Think about your favorite movie, book, restaurant, or music, or your most enjoyable vacation. Think of places where you have received excellent service. Part of the joy you receive comes in sharing it with others. As a discussion opener, ask people to tell about a wonderful experience they have shared with others.

In this passage, a blind man receives the joy of newfound sight. The healing and the new life that this blind man experiences are duplicated many times over as he testifies to God's goodness and leads others to praise God too.

1. Read the passage aloud. Who are the characters? What seem to be their primary concerns?
2. In verses 38-39, what does the blind man do to attract Jesus' attention? Why are some members of the crowd angry with him? Why do you think the blind man continues to shout?
3. What does the blind man want in verses 40-42? Why is he healed? In what ways do you see the blind man's faith?
4. What are the changes you see in the formerly blind man in verse 43? What does he do as soon as he is healed by Jesus? How does this affect the people around him?
5. In this passage, what does the blind man know about Jesus? Why is he so excited?
6. What are some of the things Jesus has done for us?

In Closing

Have you experienced this kind of excitement toward Jesus? When and how? What would it be like for us to praise Jesus in such a way that others are encouraged to follow and praise him also?

LUKE 19:1-10: ZACCHAEUS: A TRANSFORMED WITNESS

Getting Started

Where do people in our culture turn for help, change, or transformation?

Jesus is traveling through southern Palestine on his way to Jerusalem. This trip will culminate in his death and resurrection. As he journeys, Jesus makes the most of every opportunity to do ministry. Jericho, a rich agricultural town and popular resort for royalty and priests, was in Jesus' path. Zacchaeus was one of the last people Jesus met before his death. Their encounter illustrates how Jesus can transform a person from the inside out.

1. For background, read or skim Luke 18:31-43. What is happening as Jesus approaches Jericho?
2. Read Luke 19:1-10. In the first six verses (19:1-6), what are some things we learn about Zacchaeus?
3. What kind of reputation might a chief tax collector develop in a town like this? (*Note: "The Romans farmed out the task of collecting the taxes in any particular area to the highest bidder. The man did not receive any salary for his work but collected as much money as he could so that he would have a handsome rake-off after paying the government the appointed sum"* [The New Bible Commentary: Revised]. *Tax collectors were despised not only by the Romans, but also by their own people.*)
4. What strikes you about the initial meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus? What was the reaction of the crowd as they see this relationship develop between Zacchaeus and Jesus (verse 7)?
5. Jesus is a master at building relationships and communicating with people. What does Jesus do to build a friendship with Zacchaeus?
6. What seems to be going on inside Zacchaeus by the end of this encounter (verses 8-10)? How is he transformed by meeting Jesus? What might be some of the far-reaching effects of this transformation on both Zacchaeus and the other people in his community?
7. How does this passage illustrate Jesus' life mission as stated in verse 10?

In Closing

How have you experienced the seeking or saving power of Jesus in your life (maybe even in the past week)? What are some ways Jesus has changed you? How can you be a witness to Jesus' transforming power in your life?

LUKE 22:54-62: PETER'S DENIAL: A NEGATIVE WITNESS

Getting Started

Think of a time in your life when you “got caught with your hand in the cookie jar” or you did something you swore you would never do. How did you feel?

This passage takes place just as Judas comes with a crowd of people to arrest Jesus. Only a few hours earlier, Peter had sworn his loyalty to Jesus and had vowed never to leave him. Now he is about to face a crisis situation. We pick up the story at this point. Have someone read Luke 22:54-62.

1. As Jesus is taken away, Peter follows at a distance. What does this tell you about Peter's character?
2. Describe the scene in the courtyard. What is the mood and ambiance of the place?
3. What do you think prompted Peter's denials? What did he fear?
4. What is it Peter denied (see verses 56, 58, and 59)? What did Peter have to lose in being identified with Jesus?
5. How and when are you tempted to avoid being identified with Jesus or his cause? What is it you fear? What is it you would lose?
6. What breaks Peter's string of denials (verses 60-61)?
7. Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter. Why? What kind of look do you think it was? What did it communicate? What “wakes you up” to your sin? How does Jesus look into your life?
8. Once Peter recognizes what he has done, what is significant about his response? Why does he weep? What is your response once you realize your own sin?

In Closing

What can you learn from Peter about dealing with sin and temptation in your own life? In what situation do you need to stand up for Jesus instead of denying him? Pray for each other that God will give you strength in times of crisis.

LUKE 23:39-43: THE PENITENT THIEF: A POSITIVE WITNESS

Getting Started

Think of a time when you have been in a “no-win” situation. How did you feel? How did you respond? What was the outcome?

Two criminals were in that kind of situation in this passage. Jesus was there with both of them.

1. Read the preceding paragraph, verses 32-38, which describes the crucifixion of Jesus. If you were the thieves, what would be your response to Jesus’ statement on the cross (verse 34), to what the leaders said in verse 35, to what the soldiers did and said (verses 36-37), and to what the inscription said (verse 38)?
2. What is the attitude of the first criminal (verse 39)?
3. What did the second criminal recognize that the first criminal didn’t (verses 40-42)?
4. Both criminals made a request of Jesus. How are the requests different from one another?
5. From what the second criminal says to the first criminal and to Jesus, and how he says it, what do you see about his attitude? What feelings does he seem to be conveying?
6. How did Jesus answer the second criminal’s request? What does that tell you about Jesus’ response to people?
7. What do you think “paradise” is as Jesus uses it in verse 43? (*Note: The word actually appears only two other times in the New Testament—2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7. Originally it meant an enclosed part of a pleasure ground. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it was used as a term for the garden of Eden, and in intertestamental times it meant a superterrestrial place of happiness. As used here, it can mean “heaven” or “the presence of God.”*)
8. Think again about the different attitudes displayed by the two criminals. What attitudes typically characterize your requests to Jesus? In what ways do you wish your attitudes and requests could change?

In Closing

How was the second criminal a witness to the first by his words and attitude, even in this seemingly no-win situation? Think of a situation you are facing (or might face) in which the people involved have little hope. How can you be a witness to the love and power of Jesus?

LUKE 24:1-12: WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION

Getting Started

Think of some people who know you well. Would they be more likely to characterize you as skeptical and cynical or as gullible and naive? How do you decide when to take someone at his or her word, when to wait for proof, or when to disregard someone's story entirely? Have your group talk about some examples of each.

In this study we'll look at how Jesus' closest followers responded to his most outrageous claim—that he would rise from the dead. Their story will help us examine our own belief in Jesus' words and the words of his witness.

1. Have the group members read Luke 23:44-56 individually. Ask one person to summarize the events described from the women's point of view.
2. Read Luke 24:1-12 out loud. Have you ever had to deal with the death of a close friend or relative? (*Ask if just one person would share*).
3. Keeping this person's experience in mind, look at verses 1-5, putting yourself in these women's shoes. What do we know about their relationship with Jesus? (*See Luke 8:1-3 for more background*.) How has Jesus' death seemed to affect them?
4. What are the women hoping to do once they reach Jesus' tomb? (*Note: Certain spices and ointments were used in the embalming process*.) What do you imagine they are thinking and talking about on the way?
5. What may have gone through their minds when they found the body missing? What might they have thought or felt when two men "in dazzling clothes" joined them in the tomb? How do you think they reacted to the men's initial appearance?
6. The strange men explain things more fully in verses 6-8. What does Luke mean by "then they remembered his words" (verse 8)? What had caused the women to forget Jesus' words? What helps them remember and believe now?
7. In verses 9-11 the women return to the apostles to share what they had seen and heard. How did the women expect the apostles to respond? How do they respond? What does the apostles' response tell us about how the apostles have regarded Jesus' words?
8. In verse 12, why does Peter get up and run to the tomb? How does he respond differently from the other 10 apostles? Why?

9. What are Peter's options of what to believe once he sees the tomb? What could prevent him, even at this point, from believing in Jesus' resurrection? Based on the last sentence, which option do you think he chose?

In Closing

Do you believe that the things Jesus promises will actually happen? When you encounter words of Jesus that are difficult to believe, how do you respond?

1. Forget them, as the women did initially.
2. Believe, act, and bear witness as the women did after their encounter with the messengers.
3. Disregard them, as 10 of the apostles did.
4. Insist on finding out for yourself as Peter did.

What things block you from believing Jesus' words? Do you really believe them? Will you act on them? Here are references to some of Jesus' more radical statements you might want to discuss in your group: Luke 18:29-30; Matthew 25:45-46; Luke 11:19; Matthew 18:35.

LUKE 24:13-35: WITNESSES WHOSE EYES WERE OPENED

Getting Started

Try to think of a time when you were struggling to understand something and then suddenly the “lights came on” and everything became perfectly clear. What happened to make the difference?

In this study we will look at two disciples who go from confusion to insight in their thinking about Jesus. Have a few people read Luke 24:13-35 or assign parts (narrator; Cleopas and the other disciple; Jesus; the 11 and their companions).

1. Place yourself in the scene of verses 13-24. What are these travelers doing, thinking, and feeling? Why does Jesus ask the two what they are discussing (verse 17) and “what things” had been going on lately (verse 19)?
2. How would you evaluate the response of Cleopas and the other disciple? What do you think of their “gospel”?
3. Look again at verses 25-27. Is Jesus being hard on the disciples? Why or why not? What is he especially concerned about? Why do you think it was “necessary” for the Messiah to “suffer these things and then enter into his glory”? (*Note: “His glory” refers to his resurrection and ascension to the Father’s right hand.*)
4. Jesus referred to passages throughout all the Scriptures that were about him. What are some of these passages that he might have referred to? (*Note: There are many such passages; you might want to read some, such as Genesis 3:15; Numbers 21:6-9 [with John 3:14-15]; Deuteronomy 18:15; Psalm 22; 16:8-11; 118:22-23; Isaiah 11:1-7; 53:1-6; 61:1 [with Luke 4:18-22]; Daniel 7:13-14 [with Matthew 26:64].*)
5. In the final verses, how do the disciples come to recognize Jesus? What part did the Scriptures play in their coming to recognize him (verses 27 and 32)?
6. What do you think it means that their hearts “burned within them” when Jesus opened the Scriptures to them (verse 32)? Have you ever experienced this while engaging the Scriptures?
7. What do the disciples finally come to understand? How do they respond? How have they become witnesses?

In Closing

As you reflect on this passage, what do you see about how Jesus helped two confused people come to see the truth about his resurrection and become witnesses to it? What principles can you use when you speak about Jesus? What difference can the reality of Jesus' resurrection make to you each day?

LUKE 24:36-53: JESUS PREPARES FOR WITNESSES

Getting Started

Imagine you are the babysitter for three small children whose parents are going away for the weekend. You are at their home, and they are leaving in 15 minutes. What kinds of things do you think they'll tell you? What will you need to know to make it a successful, joyful weekend?

In this passage, Jesus isn't preparing babysitters; he's preparing witnesses. This is his last recorded interaction with his followers in Luke's Gospel. As someone reads Luke 24:36-53, watch and listen for how he prepares them.

1. In the preceding passage, two of Jesus' followers have been with the resurrected Jesus, heard him explain his mission from the Scriptures, eaten with him, and recognized him. In 24:33-35, these two have returned to Jerusalem to tell the 11 and those with them what happened. In the middle of their discussion, Jesus appears. Why does he greet them the way he does?
2. What words and phrases communicate the thoughts of Jesus' followers in verses 37-43? When have you *wanted* to believe something, but *couldn't* believe it at the same time?
3. What are all the things Jesus does to help them *believe* it is really him, risen from death? How does this strengthen your belief in Jesus?
4. In verses 44-47, what does Jesus want his followers to *understand*? How does he help them understand? When have you experienced a similar "breakthrough" in Bible study?
5. In verses 48-49, Jesus lets his followers in on their role in the continuing fulfillment of the Scriptures. What will be involved immediately in being witnesses? What do you expect their "job description" to be once they are empowered by the Holy Spirit?
6. Imagine the parting scene in verses 50-51. What would a blessing from Jesus mean to you if you were there?
7. How do Jesus' followers *respond* to their last interaction with Jesus (verses 52-53)? Why worship? Why obedience (returning to Jerusalem)? Why joy? How does the joy in verse 52 differ from the joy in verse 41? Describe a time when you've felt this way.
8. How did Jesus' followers change from verses 37-43 to verses 52-53? What was the process? How have you seen Jesus use the same progression to prepare you to be his witness? (Note: *The process includes [1] helping you believe Jesus is real; [2] helping you*

understand the Scriptures concerning him; and [3] helping you respond in worshipful, joyful obedience or action.) What do you need more of in order to take your place joyfully in God's plan to preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations"?

9. If you didn't know anything about Luke's next book, Acts, what would you expect it to contain, based on the end of Luke?

In Closing

Through the Gospels, we are witnesses to the same things these followers of Jesus saw. Like these followers, we are witnesses to the work he's done in our lives to bring us to *belief, understanding, and action*. Name one opportunity you'll have this week to "testify" for Jesus as his witness. What are you hoping to say or explain in order to point someone to him? Close in prayer for each other's growth as witnesses in belief, understanding, or action and for specific opportunities to testify as Jesus' witnesses.

10 STUDIES IN ACTS

This is the third in a series of three small-group Bible study discussion guides that explore the meaning of “witness.” The book of Acts is a fascinating account of the early disciples as they formed the early church and spread the good news of Jesus. Luke—a doctor who traveled along on some of these adventures—tells the story in an interesting, accurate, and reliable way. May God give your small group rich and rewarding insights as you study his Word together!

The questions in this guide are for your use in preparing and leading. (*Note: Helpful leader’s notes are in italics throughout the guide.*) Make the questions your own, and become familiar with them so that you won’t have to look down at your page too often. Have your own written responses handy as you lead the study. Decide how much discussion time each group of questions is worth, and leave time for the application questions at the end of each study.

It is easier for study and discussion if everyone has the same version of the Bible. The questions in these studies are based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) text. The New International Version (NIV) or the New American Standard Bible (NASB) are other popular versions of the Bible your group may wish to use.

ACTS 1:1-11: CALLED TO BE WITNESSES

Getting Started

In common usage, what is a witness? (*Someone who has seen something and is able to talk about it.*) In what ways are people witnesses in everyday situations? (*Think of news reporting, an accident scene, or a court scene.*)

1. Acts is Dr. Luke's sequel to his Gospel, taking up the story where he left off in the book of Luke. Read Luke 24:36-53 to set the stage for the opening to Acts.
2. Now read Acts 1:1-11. How was Jesus occupied during the time between his resurrection and his ascension into heaven? How would these things prepare the disciples for his departure?
3. Why couldn't they begin spreading the word of the kingdom of God immediately? What did Jesus mean by "the promise of the Father"? (*Note: See John 14:16-17, 25-26 for more background.*)
4. What expectation is reflected in the disciples' question in verse 6? (*Note: Most Jewish people had expected the Messiah to be a political/military ruler who would set Israel free from Roman rule and establish Israel as a great political power.*) How does Jesus redirect their attention (verses 7-8)? Are there similar concerns we struggle with that can distract us from our primary responsibilities as Jesus' representatives? How should we keep these in proper perspective?
5. What are the disciples told they'll receive in verse 8? For what purpose will they receive him? What is the scope of their assignment? If this had taken place in your town or on your campus, what places could be substituted for those in verse 8?
6. What happened next? What kinds of reactions might this have produced among the disciples? What do the men in white robes tell the disciples? How would this information have helped the disciples just then? And later?
7. At the beginning we defined *witness*. In verse 8 the disciples were called to be witnesses to Jesus. How does this call extend to us?

In Closing

Spend some time praying for power to be witnesses to the person and work of Jesus, beginning where we are and continuing to the ends of the earth.

ACTS 3:1-26: WITNESS TO AND THROUGH JESUS' POWER

Getting Started

When was a time you asked for one thing but got something better in return?

1. Have someone (or a few people) read Acts 3:1-26 aloud. How does Luke describe the condition and situation of the beggar in verse 2?
2. Recount the actions of Peter in verses 3-7. What details does Luke give in verses 7-9 to let us know that this is a miracle?
3. What was the reaction of the crowd in verses 10-11? What possible misunderstanding of the miracle on the crowd's part did Peter anticipate in verse 12?
4. From verse 12 to the end of the chapter, Peter speaks to the crowd about Jesus. Looking at verses 13-15, contrast the titles Peter uses to designate Jesus with the horrendous ways the people treated him. What "excuse" do they have (verse 17)?
5. In verses 19-23, what does Peter say is a proper response to Jesus Christ? What are the benefits? What is the consequence if they do not respond positively?
6. While scanning through Peter's entire speech, pick out the promises that God had made through his servants. How has Jesus already fulfilled those promises? How is he fulfilling them presently? How will he fulfill them in the future? (*Note: Verse 25 says that through the descendants of Abraham "all the families of the earth will be blessed." The offspring of Abraham who were to be the instruments of this blessing were the Jewish people originally (verse 25), Jesus Christ ultimately, and believers in Jesus now [Galatians 3:29].*)

In Closing

Peter and John certainly brought a "blessing" to this lame man, and a "blessing" of the good news to those who heard their message. How can you be an instrument of God's blessing to your campus this week? To the world?

ACTS 4:23-37: THE WITNESS OF LIFE TOGETHER

Background

In the section leading up to this (Acts 3:1-4:22), Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council of priests and elders. After considerable debate, they were released but sternly charged not to continue to preach the gospel. Yet Peter tells them, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Act 4:23-37 gives us an inside look at a community of witnesses to Jesus.

Getting Started

Think of a group of people—a community (Christian or non-Christian)—of which you are a member. What defines your community? How do its members relate to one another? How does the community relate to those outside it?

1. Get someone with a keen sense of drama to read Acts 4:23-37. After Peter and John are released, what is the first thing they do? How does the community respond to the situation? How does your Christian community respond to opposition?
2. Look for a moment at verses 24-28. How is God described? What do these different descriptions tell us about him?
3. As they pray, the community quotes from Psalm 2, a prophetic psalm referring to the coming kingship of Christ. Turn for a minute to Psalm 2:1-9, but don't lose your place in Acts. How are the events recounted in this psalm similar to the events recounted in Acts 4:27-28?
4. In each case, who is standing in opposition to God? How does God respond? Why is this opposition "in vain"?
5. How would recalling God's past dealing with those who conspire against him be an encouragement to this fledgling community?
6. Now look at the rest of the prayer in Acts 4:29-30. In light of what God has done in the past, what do they ask him to do for them? How does he respond to them in verse 31?
7. Verses 32-37 give us a closer look at the Christian community. What are some specific ways they lived out their "one heart and soul [*or mind*]?" What does this tell us about their priorities?

8. Verse 33 tells about their witness (“testimony”). What adjectives are used to describe their witness?

9. Put yourself in the story. If you were on the outside looking in, what might be going through your mind as you observe these Christians interacting with each other and with others?

In Closing

What does it mean to be “one in heart and soul”? What doesn’t it mean? What would your fellowship on campus look like if it really was of “one heart and soul”? What would your witness be like? What are some things you can do to strengthen your community?

ACTS 6:1-8:4: STEPHEN'S WITNESS AND DEATH

Getting Started

What do you think was the cost for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the first century? What is the potential cost on your campus or in your family?

1. Read Acts 6:1-8. What words are used here to characterize Stephen (verses 3, 5, 8)?
2. Now read verses 9-15. Compare the way Stephen's opponents handled the "problem" that they had (Stephen's powerful preaching) with the way the believers in verses 1-8 handled the problem of food distribution.
3. Why do you think the activities of Stephen and the church aroused opposition (verses 7-8)? What led Stephen's opponents to resort to deception (verse 10)? Why do you think Luke mentions in verse 15 that Stephen's face was "like the face of an angel"?
4. What are the prevalent attitudes on your campus toward the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do the things Christian students do and preach arouse opposition? Why or why not?
5. Give the group a few moments to skim Acts 7:1-50, which records Stephen's defense against the charges of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. Have them try to summarize the central point of Stephen's speech. (*Note: By tracing God's calling and promise through the patriarchs, Stephen demonstrates that it is the religious establishment—not the Christian community—that misunderstands the temple and the law of Moses. He draws the distinction between God's faithful prophets and those who rejected them. He identifies Christians as God's truly faithful people and the religious leaders as being opposed to God.*)
6. Read Acts 7:51-60. In what ways are Stephen's opponents just like their ancestors (verses 51-52)? What is the irony of verse 53? As this story unfolds, why do Stephen's opponents become so hostile? How does Stephen respond?
7. Read 8:1-4. How did the purposes of Stephen's persecutors contribute to the mission of the church (verse 4)? What does this say about God?

In Closing

Compare the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to the conventional wisdom on your campus. Do you see any evidences of hostility or suspicion toward the gospel? In what ways does your behavior affect the credibility of your witness (both positively and negatively)?

ACTS 9:1-22: WITNESS TO THE POWER TO CONVERT AND TRANSFORM

Getting Started

If you were to vote for the person “most likely never to become a Christian,” whom would you choose? Why?

If you had lived in the first century, you probably would have chosen Saul of Tarsus—and you wouldn’t have been alone. In the passage you will read the powerful story of a very unlikely convert.

1. Read Acts 9:1-2. What do these verses, as well as the previous study, tell us about Saul and his relationship with the early believers? What symbols of power does Paul have as he travels to Damascus?
2. Now read Acts 9:3-22 to get the rest of the story. Looking at verses 3-9, what happened to Saul on his journey? Try to visualize the scene, and put yourself in the place of the eyewitnesses mentioned in verse 7. What do you see and hear? What are you feeling? How do you think Saul felt?
3. What does the Lord tell Ananias to do? How does Ananias respond? Thinking of the person you chose as the “most unlikely Christian,” what would you do if Jesus came to you in a vision telling you to confront this person?
4. In verse 15, Jesus responds to Ananias’s fear and objections by commanding him to go and by sharing his plans for Saul’s life. What is the Lord’s plan for Saul’s life? (*Note: Saul later becomes the famous apostle Paul.*)
5. What happens in verses 17-20 as Ananias is obedient to Jesus’ call? How does Saul respond? What might this tell us about facing someone we don’t want to talk to but whom we feel God wants us to talk to?
6. In verses 21-22 what are the words used to describe people’s response to the message (Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ) and the messenger (Saul)? How is Saul’s life transformed?
7. Look back through the whole passage. Who has the power in this passage and who is reacting to that power? While most conversions are not as dramatic as Paul’s, how was yours similar? How did Jesus show himself to you? Was there an “Ananias” in your life?

In Closing

Think again of your choice for “the most unlikely Christian.” From this passage, what have you learned that speaks to your doubts about their becoming a believer? Take a few minutes as a group to pray for the people you mentioned.

For Further Discussion

Put yourself in Ananias’s place and imagine what he was feeling in this passage. We’re not all public preachers like Paul, but we are called to be witnesses and encouragers like Ananias. To whom can you be an “Ananias” this week? Is there a young Christian you can encourage to grow? Is there someone you need to challenge?

ACTS 13:1-12: SENT TO BE TRUTH-SPEAKING WITNESSES

Getting Started

Have you (or someone you know) ever felt called by God to do something unusual or radical? Talk about the situation and how you (or that person) responded. What were the results?

1. Read Acts 13:1-12. Look carefully at the list of prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch. (*Note: According to Acts 11:19-22, this was the first truly multiethnic local church, with Jews and Gentiles together in one local congregation.*) What do you notice about these people? What were they doing?
2. How often are praying and fasting mentioned in verses 2-3? Why do you think the people prayed and fasted before and after the selection of Barnabas and Saul?
3. Who sets them apart for the work? Who sends them on their way? How does the Spirit's initiative interact with the people's listening and obeying?
4. What would you think, and how would your church react, if next Sunday the elders announced, "This week the Holy Spirit told us to send two of our leaders off to the mission field full time. And so we sent them off. They're gone, and we're not really sure where they'll end up"?
5. According to verses 4-5, where did Barnabas and Paul go? (*Note: You might want to locate these places on a map in the back of a Bible or in a Bible atlas.*) What did they do when they got there? Why do you think they started in the synagogues?
6. They continued to preach until they came to Paphos, the seat of the Roman government on the island. In verses 6-8, who was interested in what they had to say? Who tried to stop them? Why?
7. Imagine that you are doing evangelism in another state, and a senator of that state invites you to share the gospel with him. How would you feel? What if while you are there one of his top aides opposes you? What would you do?
8. In verse 9, before Paul responds to Bar-Jesus/Elymas in words, what does Luke say about Paul? Why do you think Luke mentions these things?
9. How does Paul respond to Bar-Jesus' (Elymas's) opposition? Note that verse 6 calls the man Bar-Jesus, which means "son of Jesus." In verse 8, Luke calls him by his translated name, Elymas. In verse 10, what does Paul call him? Why do you think Paul responds with

such harsh-sounding words? Do you think that what happened to Elymas was fitting? What would you be feeling if you were there and witnessed these events?

10. How did the proconsul react when he saw what happened? Does his response surprise you? Why or why not?

In Closing

Do you know anyone like the proconsul—someone who is open to the gospel and seeking to learn more? How can you help them? Do you know anyone like Elymas—someone who openly opposes the gospel, or who tries to interfere with your sharing the gospel? How can you pray for them? How can you, led by the Holy Spirit, speak the truth to them in a way they will understand?

ACTS 16:16-34: WITNESS IN MACEDONIA: THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

Background

While in Macedonia, Paul and his companions go to a place of prayer and meet a businesswoman named Lydia. The Lord opens her heart, and she responds to Paul's message. Our study begins at this point.

Getting Started

Tell of a time you shared the gospel with another person in your everyday experience.

1. Read Acts 16:16-34. On their journey to a place of prayer, Paul and his companions meet a young woman (verses 16-18). How is she described? What is she saying and why would this trouble Paul so much? What place do you think this woman held in society?
2. Why are the owners of the slave girl angry with Paul and his companions? What charge do they bring against them? What are Paul and Silas saying from the clues in verse 17? How might this message have sounded to Roman ears? Does the gospel threaten anyone's vested interests on your campus?
3. Describe how Paul and Silas were persecuted for preaching the gospel in verses 22-24. How might they be feeling now? In verse 25, how is the response of Paul and Silas to their persecution different from the way most people would react?
4. Picture yourself as a fellow prisoner of Paul and Silas. What would you be wondering or feeling? Describe what happens to the prison in verse 26. What does this tell us about God?
5. What is the jailer's initial reaction to the earthquake? Why does he react this way (verses 23-24, 27)? What does the jailer realize in verse 30? Why is the question he asks such an urgent one?
6. How do Paul and Silas respond to his question in verses 31-32? In light of all that has happened, how does the jailer then respond?

In Closing

How do the happenings in Acts 16:16-34 motivate you to share the gospel where you are? How does this account encourage you to move out of your comfort zone on campus?

ACTS 17:16-34: WITNESS TO THE UNKNOWN GOD: PAUL IN ATHENS

Getting Started

"The world's major religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, are making inroads as are a variety of cults, New Age philosophies, occult activities and even traditional paganism. How do we cope with a world that knows or cares so little about the truth of Jesus Christ? Paul left us a helpful model when he visited the world center of pagan philosophy and religion—Athens" (*NIV Quiet Time Bible*, [InterVarsity Press](#)).

What are some of the "idols" people worship on your campus? What is so attractive about these idols?

1. Read Acts 17:16-34. What upset Paul about Athens, and what did he do about it (verses 16-17)?
2. Describe the Athenians' reaction to the gospel message in verses 18-21. What are some things that might have caused this response? (*Note: Epicureanism was a school of Greek philosophy that emphasized the remoteness of uncaring gods, a world governed by blind chance, the absence of an afterlife and the pursuit of pleasure. Stoicism emphasized a world determined by fate, where human beings must pursue their duty, "resigning themselves to live in harmony with nature and reason, however painful this might be, and develop their own self-sufficiency" (John Stott, [The Message of Acts](#) [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990], p. 281). The Areopagus was a hill overlooking Athens that served as the chief courtroom of the day; it was also a place to hold philosophical discussions.*)
3. What strategies does Paul employ when he begins his address at the Areopagus in verses 22-23?
4. What does Paul emphasize as he describes the "unknown god" in verses 24-28? Why might he stress these particular things to this group of listeners?
5. Note how Paul quotes from Greek philosophy and poetry in verse 28. Why do you think he does this? What implications does this have for us as we share Christ on campus?
6. In verses 29-31, what else does Paul say about God? How does he introduce the concept of Jesus? What does he emphasize about Jesus? If you had the time or opportunity to say just one or two things about Jesus, what would you emphasize?
7. In verses 29-31, what kind of response does Paul think the Athenians should have to his message, and why? What kind of response do they give him in verses 32-34? How are these responses like those you get as you share the gospel?

8. Paul uses the altar with the “unknown god” inscription as a “launch pad” to share God’s truth. What starting points do you have with those around you? How could you use these more effectively?

9. Paul shares the gospel with the Athenians in a way that is relevant, sensitive, and uncompromising to the truth. In what ways might you be tempted to water down God’s message to groups of people you share with? In what ways are you tempted to be too harsh? How can you avoid either extreme?

In Closing

How are you involved in the lives of non-Christians around you? If you’re not, what specific steps can you take? How can you become better equipped to effectively communicate the gospel with these people in a way they can understand?

ACTS 25-26: WITNESSES BEFORE KINGS AND RULERS

Background

As a Roman citizen, Paul could not be bound or imprisoned without a trial, and he is about to go before King Agrippa. Agrippa and Bernice were the great-grandchildren of Herod the Great, the king who ruled when Jesus was born. Festus was the procurator or governor of Judea.

Getting Started

If you were called before your dean of students or your college president to give a defense of your actions as a Christian on campus, how would you feel? What would be running through your mind?

1. Read Acts 25:23-27. Observe verses 23-24 carefully and try to picture what this scene looked like. What feeling was this pomp intended to convey to a person who is brought before the king and queen for interrogation?
2. Why is Paul appearing before them (verses 24-27)? According to verse 27 how long has Paul been waiting in jail? What would you be feeling at this point if you were Paul?
3. Now read 26:1-23. In verses 2-3 how does Paul start his defense? Why do you think he does it this way?
4. In verses 4-14 Paul tells his story. What are his major points? What does he emphasize about Jesus' commands to him in verses 16-18?
5. To what does Paul appeal in verses 19-23? How does he summarize the gospel? In verse 24, how does Festus respond? Why? How does Paul respond? Why do you think Paul asks King Agrippa if he believes in the prophets?
6. In verse 28, King Agrippa answers Paul's question with a question of his own. What feeling was Agrippa expressing? What do you see about Paul's passion and vision for the gospel in his heartfelt statement in verse 29? How does this compare with your passion for the gospel?
7. Note the rulers' conversation in verses 30-32. How have they been affected by Paul's presentation?
8. Go back over Paul's speech and summarize some of the things that Paul does to share effectively with the king, Bernice, and the governor. (*He affirms the king [verses 2-3], shares*

his own conversion story [verses 4-19], describes his calling and assures the king of his good motives [verses 16-19], explains the gospel clearly [verse 23], and appeals to the king to believe [verses 26-29].)

In Closing

What do you learn here about tailoring your message to the situation? About boldness, clarity, and respect? About the power of your story? Spend some time praying for opportunities to share the gospel boldly with those around you. Remember, God is in control; he is sovereign and powerful!

ACTS 28:17-31: WITNESSING TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH: ROME

Background

Rome was the capital of the Empire, a multicultural setting where decisions were made that affected the world. Paul had planned for a long time to visit Rome as a missionary. Instead he was brought as a prisoner. Yet this change of plans didn't deter him from his real mission: sharing the gospel.

Getting Started

Think of a time when you made plans that you thought were from the Lord—and then had to watch them change. What was your attitude?

1. Read Acts 28:17-31. What does Paul do when he arrives in Rome? In his meeting with the Jewish leaders, what does he say? Why do you think he goes to such great lengths to introduce himself and clear himself before the Jewish leaders (verses 17-20)?
2. How do the Jewish leaders respond (verses 21-22)? How do you think Paul might have felt when he heard this response?
3. Describe the meeting between Paul and the Jewish leaders in verses 23-24. Paul tried to convince them about Jesus Christ from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Think about the needs and backgrounds of students you encounter on campus. How can we put the truths about Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God into a cultural context that they can understand?
4. How do Paul's listeners respond to his case for Jesus in verses 24-25? In verses 25b-28, Paul passes judgment on his listeners using a text from the Old Testament (Isaiah 6:9-10). What point is he trying to make about them? How do you think they might have responded?
5. Look carefully at verse 28. How does this summarize some of the themes we have seen in the book of Acts? How does it fit with Acts 1:8?
6. Looking at the rest of the passage, describe how Paul spent the next two years in Rome. Whom do you think "all" refers to in verse 30? What was he proclaiming? Compare this to Jesus' words in Acts 1:1-8.

In Closing

God has put you where you are. How can you be an obedient witness in sharing the gospel with the people around you?

Conclusion

Many people think Acts has a rather abrupt ending. But in light of Acts 1:1-11, why is this a good ending? Perhaps Acts 29, 30, and so forth are really for our stories!

Take some time as a group to review some of the themes you've seen in your study of Acts. Which ones affected you most? How have you been encouraged to be bolder witnesses? To rely on the Spirit more? To appreciate God's sovereignty? To cross a cultural barrier? Decide together on a bold step you will take as a result of something God has shown you in Acts.