

ADAM HAMILTON

Author of *John*, *The Walk*, and *24 Hours That Changed the World*



LUKE

JESUS AND THE
OUTSIDERS, OUTCASTS,
AND OUTLAWS

YOUTH STUDY

ADAM HAMILTON

Author of *John*, *The Walk*, and *24 Hours That Changed the World*

LUKE

JESUS AND THE
OUTSIDERS, OUTCASTS,
AND OUTLAWS

YOUTH STUDY

by Josh Tinley

Abingdon Press | Nashville

**Luke:
Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws
Youth Study**

Copyright © 2022 Abingdon Press
All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act, the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, or in writing from the publisher. Permission is granted for local church use only by churches using these materials in conjunction with a churchwide study of Adam Hamilton's *Luke: Jesus and the Outsiders, Outcasts, and Outlaws* (ISBN 978-1-7910-2504-5). Other requests for permission can be addressed to Rights and Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, 810 12th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203 or emailed to permissions@abingdonpress.com

978-1-5018-0818-0

Scripture quotations unless noted otherwise are from the Common English Bible. Copyright © 2011 by the Common English Bible. All rights reserved. Used by permission. www.CommonEnglishBible.com.

Scripture quotation noted NRSV is from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org/>

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™



INTRODUCTION

The host of angels proclaiming Jesus's birth to the shepherds in the fields.

The parable of the good Samaritan.

The parable of the father and his two sons.

Zacchaeus climbing the sycamore tree so that he can see Jesus.

Jesus meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection.

These stories, which are among the best-known and most beloved passages from the Gospels, all come from the Gospel of Luke. Scholars consider Luke one of the “Synoptic” Gospels because of its similarities to Matthew and Mark. Many believe that the authors of these books drew information from some of the same sources. While many of Jesus’s teachings and miracles in Luke also appear in other Gospels, several stories and teachings (such as those listed above) are unique to Luke.

We have limited information about the author of Luke, and we don’t know exactly when it was written. Tradition says that the author was Luke, a traveling companion to the apostle Paul; and scholars estimate that it was written in the late first century, fifty or sixty years after Jesus’s death and resurrection. But the book itself doesn’t provide these details.

Luke’s Gospel is addressed to a man named Theophilus (a name that literally means “lover of God”). The author says that he has “investigated everything carefully from the beginning” and has written “a carefully ordered account” of Jesus’s life (Luke 1:3). Luke’s author takes his job very seriously and hopes that his book will inspire those who read and hear it to put their faith in Christ.

This six-session study explores the major themes in the Gospel of Luke and how they are relevant to Christ’s followers in the twenty-first century. It follows the story of Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection; it draws lessons from Jesus’s teachings and parables; and it examines Jesus’s interactions with the wealthy and powerful and with the poor, sick, and vulnerable.

The study includes the following sessions:

Session 1: Lifting Up the Lowly

God can work through anyone, regardless of age or station in life. Mary praises God who lifts “up the lowly.”

Session 2: Simon, Do You See This Woman?

Jesus empowered women, and women were essential to Jesus’s ministry.

Session 3: Parables from the Underside

Jesus used parables—short, fictional, but relatable, stories—to inspire his followers and teach truths about God’s kingdom.

Session 4: On the Journey to Jerusalem

As he prepares to travel to Jerusalem and the cross, Jesus welcomes people who are shunned by his culture.

Session 5: The Final Week

During his final week, Jesus shows us that greatness requires us to be humble servants.

Session 6: Crucified with the Outlaws

Jesus is arrested and executed as a criminal, but his death is not the end of his story. Jesus’s resurrection gives us hope even in the darkest times.

Using This Resource

This study can be used in Sunday school, during evening youth fellowship gatherings, or as part of a small group or midweek Bible study. All session plans include:

- a few learning objectives that leaders can focus on as they facilitate activities and discussion;
- a list of supplies that you will need for each session;
- an opening activity and prayer;
- a list of discussion questions, many with references to Scripture;
- a post-discussion activity that demonstrates how the lesson is relevant to participants’ lives; and
- closing discussion questions and a closing prayer.

These sessions involve few supplies. Most only require the following:

- Bibles;
- pens or pencils;
- paper, and
- a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers.



SESSION 1

LIFTING UP THE LOWLY

Lesson Objectives

- Consider why Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Mary were unlikely choices to be the parents of John the Baptist and Jesus.
- Explore ways that God uses young people to do the work of God's kingdom.
- Discuss what it means for God to lift up the lowly and how God calls us to do the same.
- Examine what it means for humans to be made in God's image.

Supplies

- Bibles;
- a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers;
- paper; and
- pens or pencils.

Opening Activity: Underdog Stories

Supplies: You will need a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers.

Beforehand, divide a whiteboard or large sheet of paper into two columns: "Real-Life Underdogs" and "Fictional Underdogs."

As participants arrive, challenge them to think of real and fictional examples of underdogs. As needed, explain that "underdog" describes a person or group that succeeds when they're expected not to. Examples might include sports teams that went on an unlikely championship run or fictional characters who overcome incredible odds to accomplish things that were previously unimaginable. List these underdogs on the whiteboard or large sheet of paper in the appropriate column.

When most participants have arrived, **ask**:

- What are your favorite real-life underdog stories?
- What are your favorite fictional underdog stories?
- Why, do you think, are so many people drawn to underdog stories?

Depending on how the discussion goes, you might **say something like:**

Underdog stories show us that ordinary people—people who don't have wealth or power, people who often get overlooked—can do important and incredible things. As Christians we affirm that all people are created in God's image and are blessed with unique gifts. Scripture includes dozens of stories of God using underdogs to do God's work on earth.

Open your session with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us together to begin this study of the Gospel of Luke. Thank you for each person in this group and what each person has to contribute to our community. Open our hearts and minds that we might learn from scripture and from one another. Amen.

Discussion

Read aloud Luke 1:5-7.

- Which two people does Luke introduce us to in these verses? What does he tell us about them?
- Luke tells us that Elizabeth and Zechariah are elderly and have no children. In what ways does our culture overlook or dismiss older adults?
- Many people experience sadness when they are unable to have children. And in many cultures, children are a sign of status and blessing. Read aloud Genesis 21:1-7, 22-24, 30:1 and 1 Samuel 1:9-11, 17, 20. How does God respond in these verses to women who are unable to have children? (Be clear that couples who are unable to have children are not being punished or forgotten by God and that God may also bless families with children through adoption.)

Read aloud Luke 1:26-33.

- We don't know exactly how old Mary was when she learned that she'd be Jesus's mother, but we know that she was very young, likely a teenager. In what ways does our culture overlook or dismiss young people?
- Read aloud Judges 6:14-16; 1 Samuel 16:10-13; and 1 Timothy 4:12. What do these verses say about how God works through young people?

Read aloud Luke 1:38.

- How does Mary respond to the news that she will give birth to the Messiah? What can we learn from her example?
- Later in Luke 1, Mary sings a song of praise that mentions God lifting "up the lowly." Whom do you think she is referring to when she mentions "the lowly"? (Explain that the Greek and Hebrew

words we translate as *lowly* describe people who have been pushed down and dismissed by those in power.)

- Scripture shows us many ways that God lifts up the lowly. God often blesses the lowly by working through us, God's people. How have you seen God work through other people to help those who are hurting or in need?
- What opportunities has God given you to "lift up" those who are lowly? In what ways does our congregation minister to the "lowly" in our community and world?
- Read Genesis 1:26-27. What does it mean for humans to be created in God's image? What do these verses teach us about those we consider "lowly"?

Activity: Create an Underdog

Supplies: You will need paper and pens or pencils.

Divide participants into groups of three or four. The members of each team should number themselves Person 1, Person 2, Person 3, and (if necessary) Person 4.

- Person 1 in each team should come up with a name and brief description of a fictional place. (This could be a city, a kingdom, a planet, or any other place where people could live.)
- Person 2 in each team should come up with a task that must be completed to save this fictional place. (This could be averting a natural disaster, resolving a conflict between groups of people, or dealing with a shortage of an important resource, for example.)
- Person 3 in each team should come up with an underdog who will accomplish this task. Person 3 should include a reason why this person would be considered an underdog. (Maybe the underdog is seen as too young or too old to get the job done; maybe the underdog lacks wealth or power or has an occupation that is often overlooked and disrespected.)
- Person 4 in each team should come up with additional obstacles that the underdog will have to overcome to accomplish the task. If a team does not have a fourth person, Person 1 should fill this role.

Allow two minutes for participants to complete their individual task. Then allow five minutes for groups to collaborate and build an underdog story using each person's contributions. Person 3 should write notes about the team's story. (Complete sentences and paragraphs are not necessary.)

Ask Person 2 from each team to share the team's underdog story with the rest of the group.

Then discuss:

- What do underdog stories teach us?
- How are the underdogs in our stories similar to some of the underdogs we encountered from scripture?
- How does knowing that God can and does work through all people—even the most unlikely—affect how you see and treat others?

Closing

Discuss:

- What is one thing you learned during our time together that you didn't know before?
- What is one thing that you will do in the coming week as a result of what we learned or discussed?

Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us together for this time of study and discussion and thank you for the example and witness of the underdogs we meet in Luke's Gospel. Open our hearts and minds, eyes and ears, to all the ways that you are at work in us and in the people we encounter this week; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.



SESSION 2

SIMON, DO YOU SEE THIS WOMAN?

Lesson Objectives

- Celebrate the women who play important roles in the story of our faith.
- Consider the roles that women played in Jesus's ministry and in spreading the news of Jesus's resurrection.
- Examine how we make assumptions about people based on superficial characteristics.
- Get to know one another better as unique children of God.

Supplies

- Bibles;
- a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers;
- paper;
- one copy of the "Who Are You?" handout on page 16 for each participant; and
- pens or pencils.

Opening Activity: Biblical Women

Supplies: You will need paper and pens or pencils.

As participants arrive, hand each person paper and something to write with. Challenge participants to list as many biblical women as possible.

When most participants are present, set a timer for one minute and have them keep writing. After the minute, select a volunteer to read aloud all the names on his or her list.

While this person reads his or her list, write each name on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. (If you are certain that a name is not the actual name of a biblical woman, do not write it down.) Other participants should mark these names off their lists.

Ask the person to the left of the volunteer to read aloud any names that remain on his or her list. As before, write these names on the whiteboard or paper and have others mark off these names. Continue until each

participant has had a chance to contribute or until there are no names remaining. You may add the names of these biblical women if they are not mentioned:

- Deborah: a judge and prophetess who led Israel during their early years in the Promised Land, when they were threatened by powerful neighbors (*Judges 4:4-10*).
- Huldah: a prophetess who interpreted a book of law discovered in the Temple, leading to major reforms in the kingdom of Judah (*2 Kings 22:14–23:3*).
- Phoebe: a deacon, or servant of the church, mentioned by Paul in his Letter to the Romans, who provided financial support to Paul and other church leaders (*Romans 16:1-2*).
- Junia: an apostle, described by Paul in his Letter to the Romans as “prominent among the apostles,” who was in prison with Paul (*Romans 16:7*).

Say something like:

Men controlled much of the wealth and power in the cultures and nations we read about in the Bible. They had more access to education and held positions of authority in the family and in religious communities. As a result, most of the people we read about in the Bible are men. Still, we meet many women in scripture who do great things in service of God and God’s people, such as the women we’ve listed here. And, as we’ll discover in this lesson, women were especially important to Jesus’s ministry.

Open your session with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us back together to continue this study of the Gospel of Luke. Thank you for each person in this group and what each person has to contribute to our community. Open our hearts and minds that we might learn from Scripture and from one another. Amen.

Discussion

- Luke mentions more women by name than the other Gospels and most of the other books in the Bible. Which two women mentioned by Luke did we learn about in the previous session? (Elizabeth and Mary. If time permits, have a participant read aloud Luke 2:36-38 to meet Anna, another woman Luke names in his opening chapters.)
- There are also many women in Luke’s Gospel whose names we don’t know. **Read aloud** each of the following scriptures. What woman does Luke introduce us to in each passage? What interaction does each woman have with Jesus?
 - ◊ Luke 4:38-39 (*Simon’s mother-in-law. As needed, explain that “Simon” in these verses is Simon Peter, whom we often refer to as just “Peter.”*)

- ◊ Luke 7:11-16 (*a widow in the town of Nain whose son had died*)
- ◊ Luke 8:40-48 (*a woman healed after bleeding for twelve years*)
- ◊ Luke 13:10-13 (*a woman healed of an ailment that she'd suffered from for eighteen years*)
- ◊ **Read aloud** Luke 24:1-10. Who were the first witnesses to Jesus's resurrection? How did Jesus's other followers react to their reports?
- ◊ **Read aloud** Luke 8:1-3. What do these verses tell us about Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna? (*Emphasize that these women traveled with Jesus and the twelve disciples. Also emphasize that the women supported Jesus's ministry financially, providing "for them out of their resources" [8:3].*)
- ◊ What do all of these passages tell us about Jesus's attitudes toward women and the role that women played in his ministry?
- **Read aloud** Luke 10:38-42. Which sister in this story, Mary or Martha, do you most relate to? Why?
 - ◊ Do you think that Martha is right to be frustrated with her sister? Why, or why not?
 - ◊ What is Mary doing in these verses? Why, do you think, does Jesus say that Mary “has chosen the better part” (10:42)?
 - ◊ Which sister, do you think, did what was expected of her? Which sister challenged expectations? (Explain that Jesus, among other things, was a teacher, or rabbi. Sitting at a teacher’s feet and listening was something that disciples did. Rabbis didn’t typically invite women to be their disciples. Preparing food for guests, on the other hand, was something that women were expected to take care of.)
- **Read aloud** Luke 7:36-39. What do these verses tell us about the woman who washes Jesus’s feet? Why, do you think, does she do what she does?
 - ◊ How does Simon, the Pharisee, respond to what this woman does?
- **Read aloud** Luke 7:40-48. How does Jesus respond to Simon?
 - ◊ What does Jesus see in the woman that Simon does not? What does Jesus say to the woman?
 - ◊ Who are some people, outside of your family, who show you the same love that Jesus shows the woman in these verses?

Activity: Who Are You?

Supplies: You will need one copy of the “Who Are You?” handout on page 16 for each participant and pens or pencils.

Say something like:

Jesus saw things in individuals that most other people didn’t notice. This was especially true when it came to the women he encountered. He invited women to travel with him and be part of his ministry at a time when many religious leaders did not include women in this way. When Simon the Pharisee criticized Jesus for associating with a woman Simon considered a sinner, Jesus showed that the woman was a beloved child of God whose sins were forgiven.

Often we don’t take the time to see people for who they really are. We make assumptions based on what a person looks like, what groups she or he belongs to, or what other people have said about her or him. In this activity, we’ll get to know more about one another.

Hand out copies of the “Who Are You?” printable page. Instruct participants to complete each of the sentences on the page by coming up with information about themselves that no one else in the group would know. (This may be difficult if your group includes siblings or lifelong friends, but challenge participants to think of things their group-mates would not already know.)

Allow everyone a few minutes to complete the handout. Then collect everyone’s papers.

Shuffle the papers. Then read aloud the sentences from each handout one at a time. After you read each handout, ask the group to guess which person wrote those sentences. Continue until you’ve read aloud every handout.

After you’ve completed this exercise, ask each participant to name one new thing he or she learned about someone else in the group.

Then ask:

- What surprised you most?
- What do you wish that more people knew or understood about you?

Say something like:

As Christians we affirm that all people are created by God and in God’s image. But too often we don’t see people that way. We make assumptions about people based on their sex, their age, their race or ethnicity, their occupation, or even the way they dress or style their hair. When we do this, we fail to recognize what each person has to offer. Jesus

didn't get caught up in assumptions and prejudices. He saw each person as God's beloved creation, with God-given gifts and a unique story.

Closing

Discuss:

- What is one thing you learned during our time together that you didn't know before?
- What is one thing that you will do in the coming week as a result of what we learned or discussed?

Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us together for this time of study and discussion and thank you for the example and witness of all the women we meet in Luke's Gospel. Open our hearts and minds, eyes and ears, to all the ways you are at work in us and in the people we encounter this week; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

WHO ARE YOU?

You might not know that...

I like to eat _____.

when I was a young child, I enjoyed playing _____.

when I am older, I would love to _____.

if I had the chance, I would travel back in time to meet _____.

I am very knowledgeable about _____.

I had to overcome fear when I _____.

my least favorite task or chore that I have to do regularly is _____.

even though a lot of people didn't notice, I was proud of myself when I _____.

REPRODUCIBLE – For local church use only.



SESSION 3

PARABLES FROM THE UNDERSIDE

Lesson Objectives

- Consider how fictional stories teach us lessons that we can apply to real life.
- Read and discuss Jesus's parables from the Gospel of Luke.
- Examine how Jesus used parables to challenge people and inspire them to act.
- Consider what we might do, or do differently, in response to Jesus's parables.

Supplies

- Bibles;
- a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers;
- note cards, and
- pens or pencils.

Opening Activity: The Moral of the Story

Supplies: You will need note cards and pens or pencils.

As participants arrive, hand each person a note card and invite them to think of their fictional favorite stories from books, television, movies, and other sources. Ask them to think about the lessons that these stories teach.

Instruct participants to write the name of one of their favorite stories on one side of their note card. On the other side, they should describe one lesson that their story teaches. They should do this without showing either side of their card to others in the group. Encourage participants to have fun with this activity. The lessons they describe do not need to be serious or profound. (For example, a lesson from the story of Spider-Man might be: "If you want to save your city, find a radioactive spider." A lesson from *The Wizard of Oz* might be: "Always keep an eye out for flying monkeys; they're dangerous.")

When most participants have arrived and have had a chance to write on both sides of their note cards, go around the room and have each person read aloud his or her lesson. The rest of the group should then try to guess what story teaches this lesson.

Then say:

Cultures throughout history have used fictional stories to teach lessons about life and about what is true and important. Jesus was part of this long storytelling tradition. He used short stories called parables to teach people about God's kingdom and how to live as one of his followers. Forty-nine of Jesus's parables are recorded in the Gospels. While many appear in two or more Gospels, sixteen are found only in the Gospel of Luke.

Open your session with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us back together to continue this study of the Gospel of Luke. Thank you for each person in this group and what each person has to contribute to our community. Open our hearts and minds that we might learn from scripture and from one another. Amen.

Discussion:

Note: Jesus tells some of the parables we'll be studying in this session to challenge or correct Pharisees. We've already seen other examples of Jesus butting heads with Pharisees. We might get the impression that the Pharisees were Jesus's adversaries—that they were the bad guys. As a group, Pharisees were committed to upholding Jewish law and traditions in a world where Jews were no longer in power. While Scripture gives plenty of examples of Pharisees who were self-righteous, judgmental, and misguided, we also meet Pharisees who were good, humble, and supportive of Jesus's ministry.

- What fictional stories have inspired you, taught you important life lessons, or caused you to think differently about something?

Read aloud Luke 18:9-14.

- According to Luke, to whom does Jesus tell this parable? For what reason does Jesus tell this parable?
- What do you know about Pharisees and tax collectors? Why, do you think, did Jesus choose people with these occupations for his parable? (Pharisees were devoted to upholding the Jewish law and had a reputation for being righteous. Tax collectors collected money for the Roman government, they earned money by charging people more than the amount owed, and they had the authority to do whatever they needed to do to collect their money; they had a reputation for being greedy and dishonest.)
- How, do you think, did Pharisees in Jesus's audience react to this parable?
- How do you relate to the Pharisee in this parable? How do you relate to the tax collector?

- What, do you think, does Jesus want you to do (or do differently) in response to this parable?

Read aloud Luke 15:11-32. (This is a lengthy parable. You might have several persons each read aloud a few verses or have participants play the roles of the father, the younger son, and the older son.)

- If you had never heard this story before and you had to give it a name, what would you call it? (Try to avoid using the word *prodigal*.)
- Jesus tells this story in response to some religious leaders who complain that he welcomes and eats with sinners. What does this parable teach us about “sinners” and their place in God’s kingdom?
- If you had never heard this story before, how would you expect the father to respond when his younger son returned home?
- Jesus’s parable is not only about the son who ran away but also about the son who remained loyal to his father. What do we learn about this older son? Why did Jesus include this son in the story?
- What, do you think, did Jesus’s audience find most surprising about this story?
- Which person in this parable do you relate to most? Why?
- What does Jesus want you to do (or do differently) in response to this parable?

Read aloud Luke 16:13-15, 19-31.

- What causes Jesus to tell this parable about the rich man and Lazarus?
- What does the parable tell us about the rich man? What does it tell us about Lazarus?
- What points, do you think, is Jesus making about money and wealth?
- How are you like the rich man in this parable? (When do you get wrapped up in material things and overlook the needs of others?) How are you like Lazarus? (When do you feel ignored or overlooked?)
- What opportunities do you have to reach out to the Lazaruses in our community and world (those who are either hungry, sick, lonely, or homeless, or all of these)?
- What, do you think, does Jesus want you to do (or do differently) in response to this parable?

Activity: Make a Parable

Supplies: You will need Bibles, paper, and pens or pencils.

Divide participants into teams of three or four. Each team should come up with a modern-day parable—a short fictional story that people today can relate to—following the instructions for one of the options

below. Teams may write a parable in paragraph form using complete sentences or they may write a parable as an outline, using bullet points.

Option 1: Parable for a non-parable

Parables were an important part of Jesus's ministry, but not all of Jesus's teachings come from parables. Choose one of Jesus's "lessons" below and come up with a modern-day parable that teaches the same lesson.

- Luke 6:6-11 (Jesus heals on the sabbath)
- Luke 9:46-48 (Jesus teaches his disciples about greatness)
- Matthew 5:43-48 (Jesus teaches about loving enemies)
- Matthew 6:5-6 (Jesus teaches about prayer)

Option 2: Re-create a parable

Jesus's parables resonated with his audience because they involved familiar themes and settings. Choose one of Jesus's parables below and update the characters and setting for a twenty-first-century audience.

- Luke 10:30-37 (parable of the good Samaritan)
- Luke 14:16-24 (parable of the banquet)
- Luke 15:11-32 (parable of the father and two sons)
- Luke 18:9-14 (parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector)

Allow teams about ten minutes to work. Then invite each team to summarize its parable for the group.

Then discuss:

- How did this activity give you a better understanding of Jesus's teaching?

Closing

Discuss:

- What is one thing you learned during our time together that you didn't know before?
- What is one thing that you will do in the coming week as a result of what we learned or discussed?

Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us together for this time of study and discussion and thank you for the truths that we may discover in Jesus's parables. Open our hearts and minds, eyes and ears, to all the ways you are at work in us and in the people we encounter this week; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.



SESSION 4

ON THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Lesson Objectives

- Discuss Jesus's teachings about wealth and possessions.
- Examine ways that Jesus broke down barriers by associating with people, such as Samaritans and people with certain illnesses, who were shunned by others.
- Consider what it means for God's kingdom to be here among us.
- Determine ways that your ministry and congregation can be more welcoming to all of God's children.

Supplies

- Bibles;
- a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers;
- note cards or small pieces of paper;
- paper; and
- pens or pencils.

Opening Activity: Time Doctors

Supplies: You will need note cards or small pieces of paper and pens or pencils

As participants arrive, hand each person a note card or small piece of paper. **Say something like:**

Imagine that you're a time traveler and you've been assigned to go back in time and fix a tragic historical event.

Instruct participants to answer the following questions on their card or piece of paper. (You might write these on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.)

- What historical event did you choose?
- What would you change to prevent this event, or to keep it from being so bad?
- How would this change affect the course of history?

When most participants are present and have had a chance to answer the questions, have each person read aloud what he or she wrote.

Then **say something like:**

It's easy for us to look at big moments in history and say, "If we could just go back and change one little thing, everything would have been different. We could have prevented a war or a disaster or an assassination." Jesus, unlike the people who were surprised by tragic events from history, knew what would happen when he went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He could've done things differently to prevent his trial and death, but he understood what he needed to do, and he'd prepared for it.

The Gospel of Luke spends ten of its twenty-four chapters on Jesus's journey to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51 tells us, "[Jesus] determined to go to Jerusalem." In Luke 19, Jesus finally arrives in the city on Palm Sunday. In between, Luke shows us how Jesus prepared himself and his followers for the final week of his ministry. In this session we'll look at Jesus's preparation for his final week in Jerusalem.

Open your session with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us back together to continue this study of the Gospel of Luke. Thank you for each person in this group and what each person has to contribute to our community. Open our hearts and minds that we might learn from scripture and from one another. Amen.

Discussion

Read aloud Luke 10:1-12.

- What does Jesus ask seventy-two of his followers to do? What are some of the instructions that he gave them? (*As needed, point out that Jesus is asking his followers to do the work of teaching and healing that Jesus himself had been doing. He is preparing them to continue his work after he is gone.*)

During this time in Jesus's ministry, when he was looking ahead to his time in Jerusalem, Jesus becomes especially frustrated with religious leaders who miss the point. **Read aloud** Luke 11:37-41.

- The Jewish law includes specific instructions related to ritual purity and cleanliness. How does Jesus's understanding of cleanliness differ from that of the Pharisee's?

Jesus has more harsh words for people of wealth and power and has a lot to say about greed and possessions.

Read aloud Luke 12:15, 32-34.

- What does Jesus have to say about wealth and material things?
- What, do you think, does Jesus mean when he says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be too" (12:34)?

Read aloud Luke 17:11-19. In these verses Jesus heals men who have a skin disease. (Many translations refer to “leprosy” or “lepers.” The Greek words we translate as “leprosy” and “leper” can refer to a wide range of skin diseases, including the illness we know today as leprosy. People with such ailments were considered ritually unclean according to the law.)

- Why, do you think, did these men keep their distance from Jesus?
- One of the men in this story—the only man who returned to thank Jesus—is a Samaritan. What do you know about Samaritans? (*As needed, explain that Jewish people and Samaritans both worshipped the God of Israel but didn't get along because of some cultural and religious differences.*)
- Why, do you think, is it significant that Jesus, a faithful Jewish man, spends time with Samaritans and people with skin diseases?
- Who are the “lepers” and “Samaritans” in our culture? What groups of people do we tend to ignore, avoid, or mistreat? (It may be best to have participants reflect silently on these questions instead of answering them aloud.)
- What can we learn in Luke 17:11-19 from the example of the Samaritan with a skin disease?

Read aloud Luke 17:20-21.

- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “God’s kingdom”?
- What, do you think, does Jesus mean when he says, “God’s kingdom is already among you”?
- We profess that God’s kingdom is eternal, but Jesus teaches that it isn’t something we have to wait for. We can live in God’s kingdom here and now. Where do you see examples of God’s kingdom today? In other words, where do you see Jesus’s love, grace, compassion, and humility at work in our community and world?

Read aloud Luke 18:15-17.

- What does Jesus have to say about children and God’s kingdom?

Activity: Welcome

Supplies: paper, pens or pencils

Say something like:

In this lesson we see Jesus welcome people whom others ignored or avoided. He interacts with children, with lepers, and with a Samaritan. By doing this, Jesus shows us that all people are welcome in God’s kingdom. As Christ’s followers, we should strive to make sure that everyone feels welcome in our congregation and community.

Divide participants into teams of three or four. Make sure that each team has paper and something to write with.

Instruct teams to brainstorm reasons why some people might feel unwelcome in your congregation. Reasons could include someone being intimidated because he or she doesn't know the words to songs and prayers that the rest of the congregation recites from memory, someone being unable to participate in certain church activities because childcare is not available, someone feeling uncomfortable because she or he is dressed differently from the rest of the congregation, or someone feeling unable to ask tough questions without being judged.

Allow teams a few minutes to brainstorm their lists. Then invite each team to read aloud its reasons why someone may feel unwelcome.

Each team should then select one reason from its list. Challenge teams to think of changes that your congregation could make so that fewer people would feel unwelcome for this reason. This may involve putting additional information on a screen or in a bulletin, making the building more accessible, or recruiting volunteers to do jobs related to welcoming newcomers.

Allow teams about five minutes to come up with ideas, then invite each team to present what it has come up with.

After every team has presented, discuss which of these ideas your group could help implement. Determine what steps you would need to take, or whom you would need to talk to, to make these ideas a reality.

Closing

Discuss:

- What is one thing you learned during our time together that you didn't know before?
- What is one thing that you will do in the coming week as a result of what we learned or discussed?

Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us together for this time of study and discussion and thank you for the example of Jesus, who welcomed all people even as he was preparing for his final week. Open our hearts and minds, eyes and ears, to all the ways you are at work in us and in the people we encounter this week; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.



SESSION 5

THE FINAL WEEK

Lesson Objectives

- Explore how Jesus challenged the wealthy and powerful and lifted up those who were sick, poor, and disliked because of their profession.
- Consider what it means for Jesus to be a king and how he is different from earthly kings.
- Examine Jesus's teaching on greatness and the importance of being a servant.
- Determine ways participants can follow Jesus's example in their daily lives.

Supplies

- Bibles;
- a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers;
- sheets of paper; and
- pens or pencils.

Opening Activity: Last Week in Town

Supplies: You will need paper and pens or pencils.

As participants arrive, hand them a piece of paper and a pen or pencil, and ask them to imagine that, in one week, they will have to move to someplace far away and won't be able to return for a very long time. How would they spend their final week in town?

Tell participants to list on the paper things they would do during this last week.

When most people have arrived, invite volunteers to read their lists.

Discuss:

- How did you decide what you would do during your last week in town?
- What were you most concerned with when you made your list? For example, were you focused mainly on your relationships with other people, on having as much fun as possible, on making sure that everyone remembered you, or something else?

Then say something like:

The Gospels, including Luke, spend a lot of time on Jesus's final week—the week leading up to his trial and crucifixion. When Jesus arrives in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival, he knows what is going to happen to him at the end of the week. And he knows exactly how he must use his time. In this session we'll look at how Jesus prepared himself, his followers, and the world for his death and resurrection.

Open your session with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us back together to continue this study of the Gospel of Luke. Thank you for each person in this group and what each person has to contribute to our community. Open our hearts and minds that we might learn from scripture and from one another. Amen.

Discussion:

Read aloud Luke 18:18-27.

- What does Jesus tell the wealthy ruler in these verses?
- What do you think Jesus means when he says, “What is impossible for humans is possible for God” (verse 27)? How do these words give the wealthy ruler hope? How do they give us hope?

Read aloud Luke 18:31-34.

- Verse 34 tells us that Jesus's disciples didn't understand what he was talking about. What, do you think, were they confused by? What did they expect to happen during this week in Jerusalem?

Read aloud Luke 18:35-43.

- How did Jesus respond to the blind man who was begging beside the road? How did other people respond?

Read Luke 19:1-8.

- What do you know about Zacchaeus? (*Participants may have learned that Zacchaeus was a “wee little man.” He was also a tax collector.*) What do you know about tax collectors?
- Zacchaeus was unpopular among the Jewish people in the area, but Jesus chose to stay at his house. Why, do you think, does Jesus choose to stay with an unpopular tax collector?

Read Luke 19:8 from multiple translations if possible. Some translations put this verse in future tense. (The NRSV says, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor.”) Some put it in present tense. (The CEB says, “Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor.”)

- How does the choice of tense affect what we know about Zacchaeus and how other people thought of him?

When Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, he is riding on a donkey. **Read aloud** Zechariah 9:9.

- What is the significance of Jesus riding on a donkey? What does this tell us about Jesus?

Read aloud Luke 19:36-40. Some Pharisees get very upset when the crowd of Jesus's followers in Jerusalem praise God for “the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (verse 38).

- Why, do you think, was it controversial to call Jesus a “king”? (As necessary, note that Jerusalem was part of the Roman Empire and was home to Pilate, a governor appointed by the emperor.)

Read aloud Luke 19:45-46.

- Describe what you picture in your head when you read these verses.
- Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:11 when he says, “My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a hideout for crooks.” Why, do you think, does he quote this verse?
- Visitors to the Temple purchased animals for sacrifices and offerings, and these visitors often traveled with Roman money. Accepting Roman coins at the Temple violated Jewish law, since the coins showed the image of the Roman emperor. So the Temple authorities required visitors to exchange their Roman money for Temple shekels, which were allowed. But the “moneychangers” had a reputation for overcharging visitors for Temple shekels and sacrificial animals. What they did was legal, but—according to Jesus—it wasn’t right. What are some other things that can be hurtful, even though they are legal?

Read aloud Luke 19:47-48.

- How do the Temple authorities respond to Jesus’s actions?

Read aloud Luke 21:1-4.

- What point is Jesus making about money? What point is he making about the widow’s faith?

Read aloud Luke 21:21-24.

- What, do you think, is Jesus talking about in these verses? How do you think the people who heard these words reacted to them?
- In these verses, Jesus is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year AD 70. Some of the people in Jesus’s audience would still be alive when Jerusalem fell. But Jesus doesn’t just warn of

the Temple's destruction. He also gives people hope that he will return in power and glory. What gives you hope during dark and difficult times?

- Many of Jesus's followers expected him to return within their lifetimes. Since then, there have been many more disasters and devastating events. But a lot of good has also happened in that time. In what ways has the world improved over the past two thousand years? Where do you see God at work in our world today?
- Christians profess that Jesus will one day return in glory. But we also know that Christ is alive and always present with us through the Holy Spirit and through his followers. What things can you do so that you are always prepared to encounter Jesus? (Answers might include prayer, reading and studying scripture, acts of service and compassion, and worship and fellowship with your faith community.)

Read aloud Luke 22:24-27.

- What are Jesus's disciples arguing about? How does Jesus respond to their argument?
- What does Jesus teach us about greatness? How does Jesus's idea of greatness differ from ways that our culture defines greatness?

Activity: Act like Jesus

Say something like:

During his final week in Jerusalem, Jesus challenged people with wealth and power, served people who were hurting or marginalized, and shared a meal with friends he knew would abandon or betray him. Even as he prepares for his arrest and death, Jesus sets an example for his followers, including us.

Divide participants into teams of three or four. Each team should come up with a situation in which someone encounters another person, or people, and must decide how to act. This might involve someone who encounters people who are hurting or in trouble. It could involve someone who has a conflict with friends or peers and has to determine how to respond. Or it could involve someone who realizes he or she has made a mistake that could hurt other people.

Teams should come up with two versions of the situation that they can act out for the rest of the group:

- In the first situation, the person should act in a way that would be acceptable to some people but that doesn't follow the example of Jesus. (For example, he or she might ignore people who are hurting or try to hide a mistake he or she made.)
- In the second situation, the person should act in a way that follows Jesus's example.

Allow about ten minutes for teams to come up with both versions of their situation and figure out how they'll act it out. Then invite each team to present its versions of its situations to the rest of the group.

After all of the groups have had a chance to present, discuss:

- When have you found yourself in situations such as these?
- Why is it hard for us to follow Jesus's example, even when we know what we should do?

Closing

Discuss:

- What is one thing you learned during our time together that you didn't know before?
- What is one thing that you will do in the coming week as a result of what we learned or discussed?

Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us together for this time of study and discussion and thank you for the example of Jesus, who showed grace and compassion to everyone he encountered, even as he faced arrest and execution. Give us the strength and courage to follow Jesus's example in the coming week; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.



SESSION 6

CRUCIFIED WITH THE OUTLAWS

Lesson Objectives

- Jesus prepared for his arrest and death by spending time in prayer.
- Jesus was fully human and can fully relate to our feelings of sadness, anxiety, and pain.
- Jesus's death on the cross was a sacrifice made on our behalf for our salvation and the forgiveness of our sins.
- The hours and days after Jesus's death were a time of darkness and despair for his followers.
Through his resurrection, Jesus showed that he was greater than darkness and despair.
- Christ's followers should be people of hope who show how Christ is alive and at work in the world.

Supplies

- Bibles;
- a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers;
- large sheets of paper or posterboards;
- assorted art supplies; and
- devices with internet access are optional.

Opening Activity: Love to, but I Can't

Supplies: You will need a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and markers.

Beforehand, write the following sentence (with blanks) on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper:

- I would love to _____, but I won't be able to because _____.

As participants arrive, invite them to fill in the blanks. Encourage them to avoid things that, while difficult, would still be possible. Rather, they should come up with things that they truly cannot do. (*For example:* "I would love to retire, but I won't be able to because I'm only fifteen years old." Or "I would love to travel to another solar system, but I won't be able to because faster-than-light travel is not possible.")

When most participants are present and have had a chance to complete the sentence, invite each person to say what he or she came up with. (As needed, push back on participants who sell themselves short; make sure they are naming things that truly are inaccessible.)

Then discuss:

- We all have things that we would love to do that just aren't possible. But humans also have a tendency to tell people that they cannot do things that they are actually capable of. When have you been discouraged from doing something that you thought you'd enjoy or be good at?
- What examples can you think of from history where people were denied opportunities to use their gifts and talents?

Say something like:

One of the main themes of Luke's Gospel is that Jesus breaks down barriers and welcomes all people. He ate with people he wasn't supposed to eat with, he spent time with people who were considered unclean, and he saw goodness in people whom others considered bad. Jesus taught that God's kingdom is accessible to all people, regardless of who they were or what they'd done in the past.

Open your session with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us back together to continue this study of the Gospel of Luke. Thank you for each person in this group and what each person has to contribute to our community. Open our hearts and minds that we might learn from Scripture and from one another. Amen.

Discussion:

After his last meal with his disciples, but before his arrest, Jesus goes to a garden on the Mount of Olives to pray.

- Where is a place you can go to spend time with God when you are having a hard time?

Read aloud Luke 22:40-42.

- What does Jesus pray for when he is in the garden?
- After asking that "this cup of suffering" be taken away from him, Jesus prays, "However, not my will but your will be done" (verse 42). When has God's will for you been different from what you wanted to do?

Read aloud Luke 22:43-44.

- What do these verses tell us about Jesus?
- Even though Jesus is God, he was also fully human. Why is it important that Jesus experienced the same pain, doubt, and struggle that we experience?

Read aloud Luke 22:47-53.

- What can we learn from how Jesus responds when he is arrested?
- Luke tells us that Jesus stood trial before the religious leaders, Pilate (the Roman governor), Herod Antipas (the ruler of Jesus's homeland of Galilee), and the people in Jerusalem. They found no legal basis to punish Jesus, but people still insisted on putting him to death. Why, do you think, did people find Jesus so threatening? What was it about Jesus that upset them?
- Jesus's followers considered him the Messiah and expected him to change the world and save people from oppression. But Jesus was treated and executed as a criminal. What, do you think, went through the minds of Jesus's followers as they watched him hanging on the cross?

Read aloud Luke 23:32-34.

- Jesus says, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing” (verse 34). Who is “they”? Whom, do you think, is Jesus forgiving?
- Jesus forgives those who put him to death and mock him while he is on the cross. What can we learn from his example?

Read aloud Luke 23:40-43.

- What do these verses tell us about the criminals crucified next to Jesus?
- Many first-century Jewish people believed that the realm of the dead included a place of suffering for those who had been unrighteous and paradise for the righteous. Why is it significant that Jesus tells a criminal on a cross that he will be in paradise? What does this say about God’s grace?

As Jesus died on the cross, he cried out, “Father, into your hands I entrust my life” (Luke 23:46). Other translations say, “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (NIV). This is a reference to a verse from Psalm 31, which is attributed to King David and was written several centuries before Jesus lived. **Read aloud** Psalm 31:1-5.

- What, do you think, does the author of this psalm mean by “I entrust my spirit into your hands” (verse 5)?

- Christians profess that Jesus died for our sins. What, do you think, does it mean for Jesus to have died for our sins? How does Jesus's death affect us?
- Christians have different ways of understanding atonement—how Jesus's death brings us forgiveness from sin and salvation from death—but all agree that Jesus suffers and dies for our benefit. Who in your life follows Jesus's example by making sacrifices for the good of others?
- Jesus's suffering and death is the climax of Luke's Gospel. What can we learn from Jesus's sacrifice? How does Jesus's death affect our daily lives and our relationships with others?

Activity: Signs of Hope

Supplies: You will need large sheets of paper or posterboard and assorted art supplies. Bibles and devices with internet access are optional.

Say something like:

Luke tells us that, when Jesus died, the sky went dark for three hours. We can't know for sure if Luke is referring to dark storm clouds, a solar eclipse, God miraculously turning the sky black, or if Luke is using darkness figuratively to describe sadness and hopelessness. But we can be certain that Jesus's followers experienced darkness that afternoon. Their Messiah, the person they hoped would end oppression and change the world forever, had died on a cross as a criminal. They didn't know what would happen in the days that followed, and they had every reason to worry that they'd end up on a cross of their own.

We have the benefit of knowing that Jesus would defeat death. He would share another meal with his followers and, eventually, ascend to heaven. Because we know this, we have hope even on the darkest days. As followers of Christ, who know the truth of his resurrection, we should provide hope amid darkness and despair.

Divide participants into teams of three or four. Give each team a large sheet of paper or posterboard and set out assorted art supplies. Instruct each team to create a poster that gives people a reason to be hopeful. Posters could include one or more of the following:

- Scripture verses that speak to the hope that we have through Jesus Christ.
- Reminders that God loves us and is always present with us through the Holy Spirit.
- Examples of hopeful things that have happened in your congregation or community. (*For example*, you could highlight a ministry or organization that provides food and clothing to people in need of these essentials, you could celebrate new facilities that benefit the community

such as parks or health clinics, or you could lift up people in your church or community who demonstrate Christ's love and compassion.)

- Facts about how our world—despite the darkness that persists—has become more like God's kingdom. This could include information about the number of countries that have abolished slavery or lowered their infant mortality rate or given citizens the right to vote.
- The purpose of these posters is not to pretend that darkness doesn't exist, but to give people reasons to persevere through hardship and despair. The posters should not suggest that everything is OK. Rather, they should show that there is still good in the world and in your community.

Encourage teams to make the posters visually appealing with pictures or diagrams and bright colors. As needed, suggest that they do research on phones or other devices to get information for the posters.

Allow teams about ten minutes to work. (If a team is unable to finish, allow a member of that team to take the poster home to complete it or set aside time later on for the team to continue working.) Invite each team to present its poster (even if it is unfinished) and to explain how it conveys hope.

As time permits, have volunteers read aloud each of the following passages.

- Luke 24:13-18, 28-35
- Luke 24:36-43
- Luke 24:44-49

Discuss:

- How did Jesus give his followers hope in these verses?
- Other than hope, what other emotions did his followers experience?

Say something like:

Jesus tells his disciples that they are “witnesses” to what Christ has done to change the world and offer forgiveness for sins. We are also witnesses. Even though we didn't get to see the risen Christ break bread or eat a fish, we have experienced how Jesus changes hearts and lives. As witnesses, we have a responsibility to be voices of hope, especially in times of darkness.

Closing

Discuss:

- What is one thing you learned during our time together that you didn't know before?

- What is one thing that you will do in the coming week as a result of what we learned or discussed?

Close with the following prayer or one of your choosing:

God, thank you for bringing us together for this time of study and discussion; and thank you for the example of Jesus, who gives us hope, even during times of darkness and despair. Give us the strength and courage to follow Jesus's example in the coming days and weeks; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.