



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Daily Discipleship Guide

Winter 2020-21 | CSB



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... the lake of Gen-nes'-a-ret,
... w two ships standing by the
... fishermen were gone out of then
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... and he entered into one of the
... which was Si'-mon's, and prayed him th
... would thrust out a little from the land
... he sat down, and taught the people out
... ship.
4 ¶ Now when he had left speaking, h

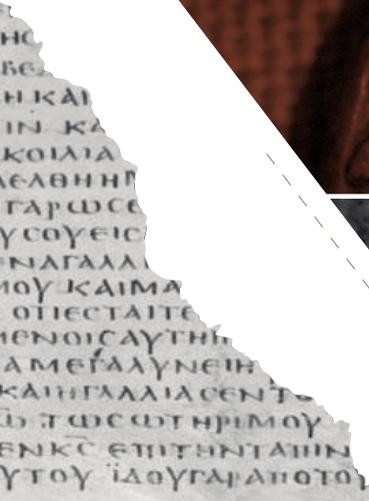
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5:4-7 In spite of the fact that his night labors had been
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U N D E R S T A N D | E X P L O R E | A P P L Y

Luke 1-9



WHO IS JESUS?

People have varied opinions about who Jesus is. This is nothing new—they always have. Jesus once asked His disciples, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (Luke 9:18). They replied that some thought He was John the Baptist, others thought He was Elijah or some other ancient prophet. While each of those answers reflected a high opinion about Jesus, they all fell short of Jesus’ true identity and mission.

Because it’s not enough to know what others are saying about Him, Jesus asked His disciples: “But you ... who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:20). After affirming Peter’s reply that Jesus was “God’s Messiah,” He taught them His mission would involve suffering—a cross. Jesus’ death on the cross, however, wouldn’t be an accident nor a tragedy; it would be the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan for our salvation. Jesus added that the cross would not be the final word, but He would be raised on the third day.

Who do you say Jesus is, and what will you do with Him? He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Right now, He is waiting for you.

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning away from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus Christ as God’s Son and accept Jesus’ gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

CONTENTS

Bible Reading Plan	6
Memory Verses	7
Introduction to Luke	8
Using the Daily Discipleship Guide	10
Leader Helps	116
Visual Ideas	160
Coming Next Quarter	162



SESSIONS

SUGGESTED FOR
THE WEEK OF

DEC. 6	SESSION 1:	Planned (Luke 1:13-25)	12
		<i>Leader Helps on page 121</i>	
DEC. 13	SESSION 2:	Conceived (Luke 1:26-38)	20
		<i>Leader Helps on page 124</i>	
DEC. 20	SESSION 3:	Proclaimed (Luke 2:4-19)	28
		<i>Leader Helps on page 127</i>	
DEC. 27	SESSION 4:	Anticipated (Luke 2:25-38)	36
		<i>Leader Helps on page 130</i>	
JAN. 3	SESSION 5:	Matured (Luke 2:41-52)	44
		<i>Leader Helps on page 133</i>	
JAN. 10	SESSION 6:	Prepared (Luke 3:7-18)	52
		<i>Leader Helps on page 136</i>	
JAN. 17	SESSION 7:	Compassionate (Luke 6:27-38)	60
		<i>Leader Helps on page 139</i>	
JAN. 24	SESSION 8:	Rejected (Luke 4:16-20)	68
		<i>Leader Helps on page 142</i>	
JAN. 31	SESSION 9:	Followed (Luke 5:4-11,27-32)	76
		<i>Leader Helps on page 145</i>	
FEB. 7	SESSION 10:	Forgives* (Luke 5:17-26)	84
		<i>Leader Helps on page 148</i>	
FEB. 14	SESSION 11:	Reigns (Luke 6:1-11)	92
		<i>Leader Helps on page 151</i>	
FEB. 21	SESSION 12:	Loved (Luke 7:40-50)	100
		<i>Leader Helps on page 154</i>	
FEB. 28	SESSION 13:	Ashamed (Luke 9:18-27)	108
		<i>Leader Helps on page 157</i>	

*Evangelistic Emphasis

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Daily Discipleship Guide
Winter 2020-21
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FROM THE **TEAM LEADER**

Coaches talk about setting the tone early. They preach about the importance of warming up with purpose, tucking in your jersey, and taking the field with enthusiasm. They know of the importance of that first play, first pitch, and first shot. Teams only win at the conclusion of the game, but they can lose it at the beginning. Beginnings matter.

In Luke's Gospel, we discover a great deal about the beginning of Jesus' life. We find out about a priest named Zechariah, who saw an angel but couldn't tell anyone about the visit. We are told about his wife, Elizabeth, who was pregnant when she was visited by Mary, her relative who had also encountered an angel. At the birth of Jesus, we are introduced to shepherds, Simeon, and Anna. We are also told about a conversation between a twelve-year-old and teachers in the temple.

These beginnings set the tone for what was to come. Zechariah was told that his son would prepare the way for the Messiah. Mary was told that she would supernaturally conceive a child who would be the Son of God. Shepherds sought and found the Savior. Simeon pointed to a day when Mary's soul would be pierced. Jesus would have more conversations with those teachers in the temple. Beginnings matter.

During our study of Luke 1-9, we will discover the importance of these beginnings and how they move us toward the conclusion: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Our prayer is that we will be reminded of God's redemptive plan, knowing that God invites each of us to be included in that redemption.

In His Service,

Dwayne McCrary

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BIBLE READING PLAN

DECEMBER

- 1. Luke 1:1-4
- 2. Luke 1:5-7
- 3. Luke 1:8-13
- 4. Luke 1:14-17
- 5. Luke 1:18-20
- 6. Luke 1:21-25
- 7. Luke 1:26-30
- 8. Luke 1:31-33
- 9. Luke 1:34-38
- 10. Luke 1:39-45
- 11. Luke 1:46-49
- 12. Luke 1:50-56
- 13. Luke 1:57-66
- 14. Luke 1:67-75
- 15. Luke 1:76-80
- 16. Luke 2:1-7
- 17. Luke 2:8-12
- 18. Luke 2:13-16
- 19. Luke 2:17-20
- 20. Luke 2:21-24
- 21. Luke 2:25-27
- 22. Luke 2:28-32
- 23. Luke 2:33-35
- 24. Luke 2:36-38
- 25. Luke 2:39-40
- 26. Luke 2:41-47
- 27. Luke 2:48-50
- 28. Luke 2:51-52
- 29. Luke 3:1-6
- 30. Luke 3:7-9
- 31. Luke 3:10-14

JANUARY

- 1. Luke 3:15-20
- 2. Luke 3:21-22
- 3. Luke 3:23-38
- 4. Luke 4:1-4
- 5. Luke 4:5-8
- 6. Luke 4:9-13
- 7. Luke 4:14-15
- 8. Luke 4:16-21
- 9. Luke 4:22-30
- 10. Luke 4:31-37
- 11. Luke 4:38-41
- 12. Luke 4:42-44
- 13. Luke 5:1-7
- 14. Luke 5:8-11
- 15. Luke 5:12-16
- 16. Luke 5:17-20
- 17. Luke 5:21-26
- 18. Luke 5:27-32
- 19. Luke 5:33-35
- 20. Luke 5:36-39
- 21. Luke 6:1-5
- 22. Luke 6:6-11
- 23. Luke 6:12-16
- 24. Luke 6:17-19
- 25. Luke 6:20-26
- 26. Luke 6:27-36
- 27. Luke 6:37-42
- 28. Luke 6:43-45
- 29. Luke 6:46-49
- 30. Luke 7:1-10
- 31. Luke 7:11-17

FEBRUARY

- 1. Luke 7:18-23
- 2. Luke 7:24-30
- 3. Luke 7:31-35
- 4. Luke 7:36-39
- 5. Luke 7:40-50
- 6. Luke 8:1-8
- 7. Luke 8:9-10
- 8. Luke 8:11-15
- 9. Luke 8:16-18
- 10. Luke 8:19-21
- 11. Luke 8:22-25
- 12. Luke 8:26-33
- 13. Luke 8:34-39
- 14. Luke 8:40-48
- 15. Luke 8:49-56
- 16. Luke 9:1-6
- 17. Luke 9:7-9
- 18. Luke 9:10-17
- 19. Luke 9:18-20
- 20. Luke 9:21-22
- 21. Luke 9:23-27
- 22. Luke 9:28-36
- 23. Luke 9:37-42
- 24. Luke 9:43-45
- 25. Luke 9:46-48
- 26. Luke 9:49-50
- 27. Luke 9:51-56
- 28. Luke 9:57-62

MEMORY VERSES

Session 1:

And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people. — Luke 1:17

Session 2:

For nothing will be impossible with God.— Luke 1:37

Session 3:

Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. — Luke 2:11

Session 4:

Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: “Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed — and a sword will pierce your own soul — that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”— Luke 2:34-35

Session 5:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people. — Luke 2:52

Session 6:

And the Holy Spirit descended on him in a physical appearance like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.” — Luke 3:22

Session 7:

But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. — Luke 6:27-28

Session 8:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. — Luke 4:18-19

Session 9:

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.— Luke 5:32

Session 10:

“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”— he told the paralyzed man, “I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home.”— Luke 5:24

Session 11:

Then he told them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”— Luke 6:5

Session 12:

And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” — Luke 7:50

Session 13:

Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.” — Luke 9:23

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

Luke's Gospel came along after other accounts had been written (Luke 1:1). It offers precepts and principles, stories of miracles and compassion. Ultimately, the Gospel of Luke is a testimony about God the Son as He took on human flesh and became the Son of Man. As the Son of Man, He walked among humanity, experienced love and hate, suffered rejection and death, and rose victoriously to offer salvation to whomever would repent, believe, and receive Him. Luke was a Gentile. As such, he wrote his Gospel in such a way that appealed to non-Jews who were strongly influenced by Greek language and culture.

Key themes of Luke's Gospel include:

Son of God and Son of Man — Jesus' birth was the result of God's supernatural miracle through a virgin named Mary. Throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus' words and deeds attest to His oneness with God. At the same time, Luke frequently quoted Jesus' self-reference as the Son of Man (5:23; 6:5; 9:22; 12:8). This title was a direct claim to be the Messiah but also demonstrated Jesus' identity with humanity.

Proof of the Messiah — Miracles abound in Luke. Jesus fed multitudes, healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. These miracles attest to His compassion for people but also give testimony to His divine nature and lordship (7:22). Jesus' lordship included reign over the Sabbath, sickness, satanic attacks, and death (6:1-10; 7:11-17; 8:26-39).

Preparation for the future — From the early chapters to the end of the book, Luke described how Jesus chose and prepared men to lead the church in the future (5:10-11; 5:27; 9:1-6).

The kingdom of God — While Luke did not include as many kingdom parables as Matthew, he described Jesus' preaching about the kingdom of God (4:43; 8:1). Jesus sent the disciples forth to preach about the kingdom (9:1-2). In His presence was found the nearness of the kingdom (10:9-11).

The availability of the kingdom for believers from all peoples — Luke emphasized Jesus' statements and deeds that demonstrate the kingdom of God is not for Jews alone but for everyone who will repent and believe (9:52; 10:33; 17:16).

The future judgment and the urgency of commitment — Because God's judgment is inevitable, commitment to Jesus is imperative. People who are not willing to make an irrevocable decision to follow Him are not worthy of God's kingdom (9:62).

OUTLINE OF BOOK

- I. Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (1:1–4:13)
 - A. Formal prologue (1:1-4)
 - B. Births of John the Baptist and Jesus (1:5–2:20)
 - C. Childhood and early adulthood of Jesus (2:21-52)
 - D. Ministry of John the Baptist (3:1-22)
 - E. Genealogy of Jesus (3:23-38)
 - F. Testing of Jesus by the devil (4:1-13)
- II. Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50)
 - A. Early preaching (4:14-44)
 - B. Calling of disciples, then apostles (5:1–6:16)
 - C. The Sermon on the Plain (6:17-49)
 - D. Faith issues; the sending out of the Twelve (7:1–9:17)
 - E. Peter's confession and the transfiguration (9:18-50)
- III. Jesus' Ministry in Judea and Perea (9:51–19:44)
- IV. Climax of Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28–24:53)



ON THE COVER

Denarius coin depicting Tiberius;
c. AD 14-37; silver

USING THE **DAILY DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE**

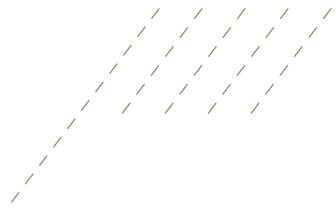
Follower. Adherent. Loyalist. Attached. Allegiant. Zealous. Disciple. Jesus' call is the same to all people: to follow Him as a disciple. He expects more than a courteous nod. He deserves more than intellectual agreement. He calls us to be disciples—growing disciples. How do we do that?

We know that a person's spiritual growth hinges on daily Bible engagement. *Daily* implies a discipline much like exercising, brushing teeth, or eating a certain number of calories EVERY day. Should we be any different when it comes to our spiritual training? The focus is the *Bible*, God's Word. There is nothing wrong with knowing the thoughts of great philosophers, leaders, or theologians, but they must not replace God's Word. *Engagement* implies participating in the act of reading, studying, and reflecting. Engagement is active, requiring us to do something.

Your *Daily Discipleship Guide* is full of tools to help you grow as a disciple. But like any tool, you have to use it to get the benefit.

- Use this resource when studying with a group. The first five pages of each session help the group leader introduce a Bible passage and move you toward acting on the truths discovered.
- Use the **Daily Exploration** pages to go deeper into God's Word, building on your group's study experience. Engage in daily Bible study, record your thoughts, reflect on the questions, and take action.
- Use the **Talk It Out** section at the end of each session to hold yourself and others accountable by meeting in a smaller group of same-sex individuals (an accountability group). Share with the smaller group what God has been teaching you through the group time and your personal daily Bible study.
- Use the resource every week even when you are unable to attend the group's Bible study. Missing a group Bible study does not excuse you from being engaged daily with God through His Word. Use the Daily Discipleship Guide to move forward in your spiritual growth.

Want this resource on your phone or tablet for when you are on the go? Purchase an eBook at goExploreTheBible.com or at LifeWay.com.



Getting the most from Talk It Out

Talk It Out, found at the end of each session, supports groups of three or four people who come together weekly to encourage, share, build up, and sharpen each other. While other issues may be addressed, the Talk It Out section provides a few directed questions based on the previous group experience and daily Bible engagement suggestions to start the weekly conversation.

These groups are made up of three to four people...

- Participants should be of the same gender.
- These groups should be smaller on purpose.
- These groups can meet at almost any location.
- These groups can easily accommodate each other's schedules.

...Who meet weekly...

- Life happens weekly, so meeting weekly is important.
- There is nothing like sitting across from friends over coffee, a meal, or dessert.
- In some cases, your smaller group may need to meet using technology that allows for video conferencing.
- You may find it best to meet face-to-face every other week or once a month and use virtual tools the other weeks.

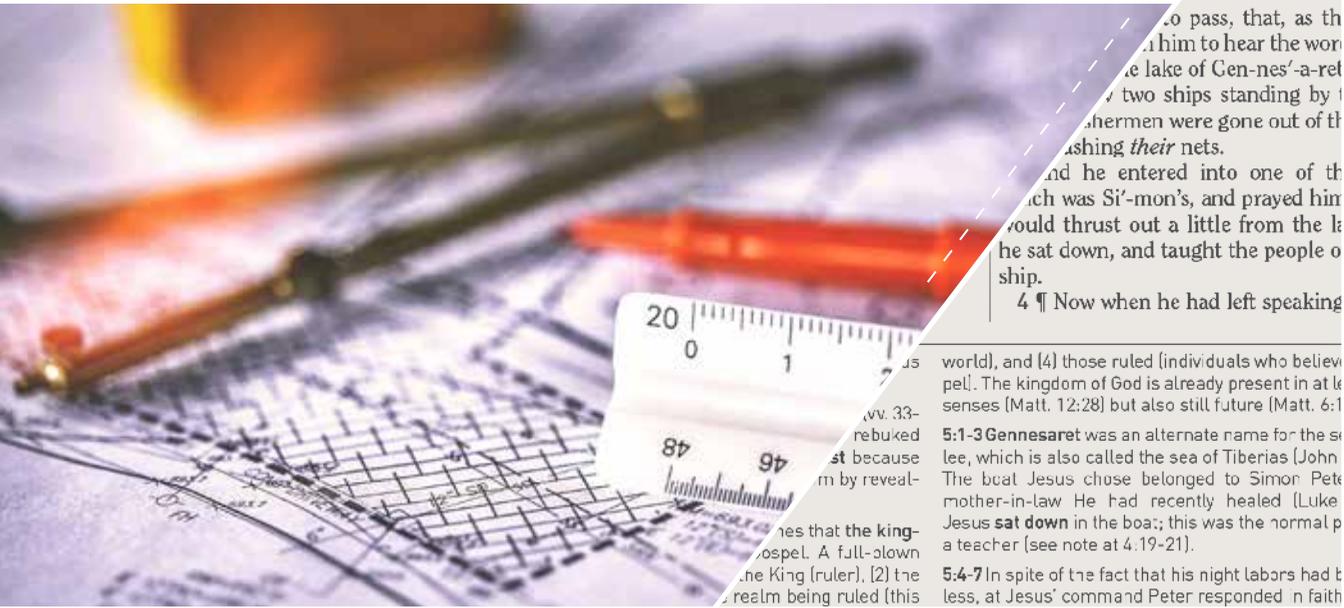
...To hold each other accountable and encourage each other in their spiritual growth.

- Review the questions in Talk It Out.
- You may focus on one question more than others.
- Include time to pray for each other.

Planned

God's promises point to His redemptive plan for His creation.

LUKE 1:13-25



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him to hear the wor
the lake of Gen-nes'-a-ret
two ships standing by th
fishermen were gone out of th
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5:4-7 In spite of the fact that his night labors had b
less, at Jesus' command Peter responded in faith



What items have you repurposed that were once viewed as used up or useless?

Several current television shows highlight the secondhand retail industry. The stars of the shows shop for bargains in barns, flea markets, and pawn stores. They are looking for treasures among items that most people would deem used up or worthless. Most of the shows save one final purchase for the end of the program, when the star of the show stumbles upon an item of great value, purchases it, and repurposes it to highlight its value to the new owner. These shows highlight the concept of redemption.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Luke is one of four Gospels the early church recognized as authoritative and trustworthy as the Word of God. Rather than taking the Gospel accounts and combining them into one book, the early church valued having four Gospel accounts, written by inspired, first-century writers.

Though the writer of the third Gospel is not named in the text, evidence points to Luke, a coworker of Paul (Philem. 24), as the writer. As part of a two-volume set, this Gospel is the prequel to Acts (Acts 1:1-3). Luke is referred to as a doctor in Colossians 4:14. His thorough writing method would lend credence to this.

Luke emphasized Jesus' concern for all people, especially those who were social outcasts. These included poor people, women, and those labeled by society as sinners. Luke also emphasized prayer by recalling the prayers of Jesus (Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18) and included parables about prayer (11:5-13; 18:1,10). One of the most striking features of Luke's Gospel occurs at the beginning. He recorded the most

detailed and orderly portrayal of the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding it.

The infancy narratives in Luke are a direct reflection of Luke's approach to writing. He was aware that others had written Gospels about Jesus (1:1), and he tested these writings by the original eyewitnesses (1:2). Luke then carefully investigated everything in order that he could provide an orderly sequence to his readers (1:3).

Luke began his Gospel by focusing on two births—the birth of the forerunner to the Messiah and the birth of the Messiah Himself. The story of the forerunner's birth took place in the household of Zechariah, an aging priest, and his wife Elizabeth. This is where the redemption story would begin to unfold.

LUKE 1:13-25

13 But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him **John**^A. **14** There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. **15** For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and **will never drink wine or beer**^B. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb. **16** He will **turn many**^C of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. **17** And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people.” **18** “How can I know this?” Zechariah asked the angel. “For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.” **19** The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. **20** Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper **time**^D.” **21** Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. **22** When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and **remained speechless**^E. **23** When the days of his ministry **were completed**^F, he went back home. **24** After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, **25** “The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people.”

Passage Outline

Prayer Answered
(Luke 1:13-17)

Doubt Expressed
(Luke 1:18-20)

Reality Seen
(Luke 1:21-25)

Key Words

- A. John means “The Lord is gracious.” His role would be to prepare the Lord’s people for the coming Messiah.
- B. This was part of the Nazirite vow (Num. 6:3-4). Being drunk “leads to reckless living” (Eph. 5:18).
- C. John’s baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4) would “persuade many a Jew to turn to the Lord his God” (TLB).
- D. Two Greek words for “time” occur in the New Testament: *chronos* (chronological time) and, used in this verse, *kairos* (a divinely-appointed time).
- E. Zechariah was able to speak again eight days after John’s birth at the baby’s circumcision (Luke 1:64).
- F. Each priest was on duty a week at a time.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

An extraordinary day in the life of an ordinary priest initiated God's redemptive plan on earth. God used the process of casting lots to place Zechariah in the place where He would send a message of redemption (Luke 1:8-9). This message would involve the sending of the Messiah but would also include God's sending a special child to Zechariah and his barren wife (v. 7).

DID YOU KNOW? Gabriel is one of only two angels identified by name in the Bible. The other is Michael the archangel (Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7). Twice Gabriel appeared to Daniel (Dan. 8:15-27; 9:20-27), and he announced the births of John the Baptist (Luke 1:8-20) and Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

How did connecting the birth of John to Old Testament prophecy communicate the importance of this child? How does connecting our prayers to Scripture help us understand how God's answers relate to His redemptive purposes?

BIBLE SKILL: Compare similar Bible stories. Compare Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke 1 to Elkanah and Hannah in 1 Samuel 1. What similarities and differences can you identify between these two stories? Reflect on these narratives personally. What prayers have you been asking that seem to go unanswered? In what way do you see God's plan in the way He has responded to your prayers?

Zechariah expressed doubt about the angel's announcement that he and his wife would finally have a child. That's the danger of doubt; it can sneak into the middle of a worship experience even for those who are living for the Lord.

Can a person be devoted to the Lord and still express doubt?

How can doubt sometimes result in greater faith?

All the *people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long.* As he left the holy place, Zechariah would have joined other priests in pronouncing a benediction. But since he could not speak, he tried to communicate with his hands.

What are some of the promises of God that you are still awaiting?

How does patience and time only enhance the anticipation of the fulfillment of that promise?

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him (Deut 8:18).

Zechariah's wife Elizabeth conceived. One cannot overemphasize the magnitude of this moment, as she had waited all her married life to share this news.

APPLY THE TEXT

- God is working to bring about His redemptive plan.
- God has the power to do what He says He will do.
- Believers can live with the confidence that God keeps His promises.

What role do you play in spreading the message of God's redemptive plan for His creation? Who do you know that needs to be told about God's salvation through faith in Jesus?

As a group, discuss some of the doubts that you have about your role in God's redemption story and spreading it to others. What assurances do you have that He indeed wants to use you?

List points of gratitude to God for the promises He has fulfilled in your life. Look for these fulfilled promises throughout the week and immediately offer gratitude to God for involving you in His redemptive plan.

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: God answers prayers.

Read Luke 1:13-14, underlining verse 14.

As Zechariah approached the altar of incense, an *angel* appeared next to the altar. As was common in Luke, the witness to an angel's appearance became *afraid*. (See also Luke 1:29; 2:9.) The same was true for those who witnessed angels in the Old Testament. (See Judg. 6:22-23; Dan. 8:16-17.) The angel would later identify himself as Gabriel. He would later appear to Mary (Luke 1:26). Gabriel announced to Zechariah: *your prayer has been heard*. How many times had Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed for a child? How much time had passed with no positive results of a child? Yet even in their old age they continued to pray. Not only did Gabriel announce they would have a *son*, he also named the child *John*, which means "the Lord is gracious." The angel declared that *many will rejoice at his birth*. The birth of John would inject a note of joy into the world because he would prepare the way for a greater birth to come.

What are some examples that you've seen in your own life of good and godly people who have faced challenges? How have you seen God answer their prayers?

Day 2: John was set apart for God's glory.

Read Like 1:15-17, considering the purpose God had for John.

The special nature of Zechariah's son was emphasized by the requirements given to him. First, he would be *great*. This same word was used of both John and Jesus (Luke 1:32), though that is not to say they were equal in their greatness. God had plans for John to announce the coming of Jesus. Because of his specific calling, Zechariah was to set John apart by withholding alcohol from him. This could be a reference to the Nazarite vow mentioned in Numbers 6:1-12. The Bible does set a precedent of requiring some leaders to refrain from alcohol (Prov. 31:4; Jer. 35:6). As in this passage, it also contrasts the filling of alcohol with the filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). From conception, this child was set apart by God for God's glory. Through the angel God revealed two purposes for John. Even *the children of Israel* would need to repent and turn to God through Jesus Christ. Zechariah's son, John, would emphasize the need for conversion in his preaching to the Jews (Luke 3:3). The preparatory work of Zechariah's son was prophetically described by Isaiah (Isa. 40:3-5), and the connection with the *spirit and power of Elijah* was foretold by Malachi (Mal. 4:5-6).

How did connecting the birth of John to Old Testament prophecy communicate the importance of this child? How does connecting your prayers to Scripture help you understand how God's answers relate to His redemptive purposes?

Day 3: We can believe God will follow through on His promises.

Read Luke 1:19-20, identifying why Zechariah was made mute.

The angel identified himself as *Gabriel*, which means “mighty man of God.” Why should Zechariah believe the news that he would have a child? An angel was speaking to him, and that angel was one who *stands in the presence of God*. Maybe Zechariah had reason to doubt the angel himself, but not the One who sent the angel. God had commissioned the angel and told him to go and tell this news to Zechariah. Luke used two verbs that would be adopted by Jesus’ followers as they went forth with the message of Christ. The word *sent* is the word from which apostle is formed, and it meant “to send with a message.” The angel was not there by accident or for a random reason. He had a special message to deliver to Zechariah. The second verb (translated as a noun in some translations) is *tell you this good news*, which is the basis of our English word *evangelism* and also the word for *gospel*. The angel’s proclamation to Zechariah resulted in him preaching the gospel to the aged priest. Zechariah’s unbelief involved doubt that God would do what He had promised in Scripture and announced through the angel. His doubt was serious enough that it carried consequences with it; he would not be able to speak for the next nine months. He would be mute only until the birth of his child. Although the muteness was because Zechariah *did not believe* the words of the angel or the word of God, it also would serve to strengthen his faith.

Can you be devoted to the Lord and still express doubt? How has doubt led you to a greater faith?

Day 4: Our belief in God’s promises strengthens our faith.

Read Luke 1:21:23, noting how the people responded to Zechariah.

As he left the holy place, Zechariah would have joined other priests in pronouncing a benediction. But since he could not speak, he tried to communicate with his hands. What must the people have thought as Zechariah tried to explain such a miraculous event? They realized he must have *seen a vision in the sanctuary*, though they certainly could not have understood the vision from his hand gestures.

Zechariah completed *the days of his ministry*. The priest’s ministry included one week of service, so he would not have had to wait long to go home to his family. After a period of silence in Jerusalem, he returned to his home ready to believe the promises of God.

How did people waiting for Zechariah respond to him? What details might they have wanted? What details would you have been interested to hear?

Day 5: God keeps His promises.

Read Luke 1:24-25, noting Elizabeth's response to her pregnancy.

The text indicates Elizabeth's gratitude that God had answered her prayers and kept His promises. She explained that the Lord has done this for me. How many times had she and her husband come together, hoping for a child? This was not their doing but God's. He had given her a child in her old age. He had looked with favor upon her. God had noticed her barrenness and had removed the social disgrace she felt. She had endured the reproach of those who criticized her because of her barrenness even though she faithfully served the Lord. Childlessness was often viewed as a disgrace (Gen. 16:4,11; 29:32; 30:1,22-23; Lev. 20:20-21; 1 Sam. 1:5-6,11; 2:5-8; 2 Sam. 6:23; Jer. 22:30; 36:30). Quite the opposite, her lengthy period of childlessness served to further the reality that God keeps His promises, not just to her as a woman but to Israel as a nation through the sending of Messiah.

What are some of the promises of God that you are still awaiting?

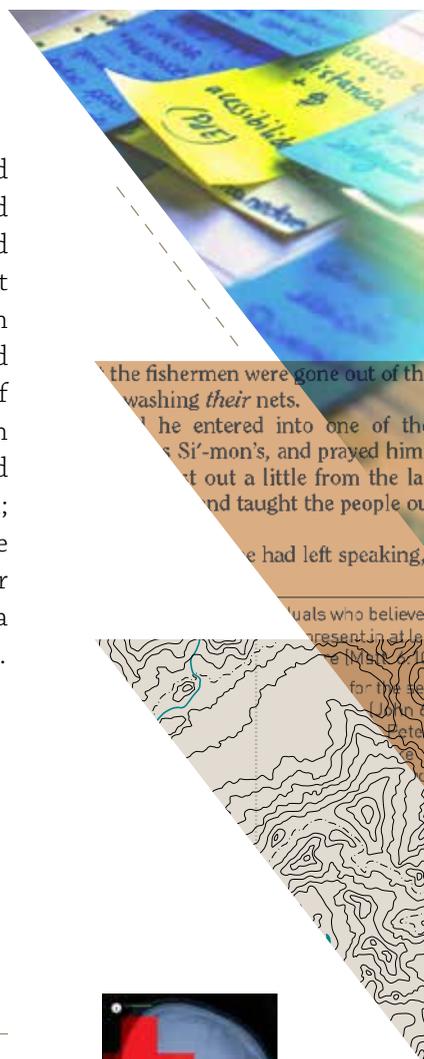
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Luke 1, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.

Review verse 17. With what people might our actions intertwine to bring God's good?

God doesn't mind questions, but in Luke 1:18-20 He did. Why? Compare this passage with 1:34-37.

How did Zechariah and Elizabeth respond in obedience to God's promises?



For additional context, read "Luke: The Man and His Gospel" in the Winter 2020-21 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

LEADER HELPS

Using the Daily Discipleship Guide to Lead a Bible Study Group

The *Daily Discipleship Guide* was created for the purpose of building disciples. As the leader of the group, you play a major role. You can build disciples through the group Bible study time, encouraging daily Bible engagement, facilitating smaller groups, and apprenticing future leaders.

Building Disciples through the Group Time

Leading the group Bible study time is the most direct way you will build disciples. Each week, you will introduce the group to the Bible passage, examine the key message in that passage, and challenge the group to act on that passage. Doing so requires preparation. Here is a way to prepare that gives you adequate time to study the lesson and will make the session fresh in your own life.

Early in the Week (Sunday or Monday)

- Ask God to open your mind and heart to His Word as you study.
- Study the Bible passage.
 - Read the passage in your Bible, listing key words, phrases, places, and people.
 - Review the first five pages of the *Daily Discipleship Guide* for that session and the commentary provided in the Leader Helps for that session. On your list, add information discovered about the words, phrases, places, and people listed.
 - Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* for additional insight.
 - Consult *Biblical Illustrator* for articles that give biblical backgrounds to the passage.
- Pay careful attention to the Apply the Text section for that session, looking for ways you need to apply the Bible in your own life.



Through the Week

- Ask God to direct your creation of the group plan.
- Create a group plan.
 - Review the group plan in the back of the *Daily Discipleship Guide*.
 - Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group.
 - Consult *QuickSource* for additional ideas.
 - Review the weekly Adult Extra idea on the Explore the Bible blog (goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).
 - Note: You can create custom plans using the DOC file provided in the Digital Download for the *Leader Pack*—it’s the same content printed in the Leader Helps.
- Complete the Daily Exploration activities in the days leading up to the group time.
- Meet with a group of three to four other teachers to share and pray for each other. Use Talk It Out to start your conversation.
- Start gathering items you plan to use in the group time.
- Pull needed posters from the *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack* (or create your own using Visual Ideas on pages 160–161).

The Day before Group Study Time

- Pray for specific group members and their needs.
- Review your group plan, making any additional adjustments.
- Make sure you have all your resources gathered.

The Day of the Group Study Time

- Arrive early.
- Pray for the study and the group members.
- Lead the study, adjusting as you go.

Continued on next page — — — — —

After the Group Study Time

- Consider the After the Session idea at the end of the group plans.
- Contact all group members, encouraging them to complete the Daily Exploration section and sharing gathered prayer requests and other appropriate information.
- Record insights gained about teaching, group members, and Scripture.
- Do it all again.

Building Disciples by Encouraging Daily Bible Engagement

As teachers, we have taken on the responsibility of encouraging everyone on our ministry list (class roll, membership list, etc.) to engage daily in Bible study. We can't make them do it, but we can provide them with a tool and encourage them to use it.

Here are some ways to encourage your group to engage with the Bible daily.

- **Ask them.** That seems simple, but the simple is not always easy. Learn to comfortably ask if group members are studying the Bible. You may want to use a statement instead of a question, such as, "I hope you took a look at the Day 3 activity for this week." It's a question disguised as a statement, so it's not as threatening.
- **Tell them.** Let them know that you are using the Daily Exploration section as well. Set the standard.
- **Show them.** Point to the Daily Exploration section at the conclusion of the group study. From time to time, demonstrate how to use the section, guiding them through Day 1 as a group.
- **Invite them.** Call on pre-enlisted volunteers to share with the group what they are learning and how they are using the Daily Exploration section.

Building Disciples through Smaller Groups

Peter became the spokesman for the early church, preaching a sermon that registered three thousand decisions in one day. John, the youngest disciple, would live the longest of the Twelve and would be used to write a Gospel and to give us a glimpse into eternity through the Book of Revelation. James, John's older brother, was the first of the Twelve to be a martyr. These three men were the three people that Jesus seemed to invest in the most. They were the three taken up to the mountain to see His transfiguration. They were the three called on to go further into the garden as He prayed awaiting His betrayal. The lives and deaths of Peter, James, and John remind us of the importance of smaller groups of three to four meeting to hold each other accountable for spiritual growth.

At the end of every session, you will find a section entitled Talk It Out. This section is designed for smaller groups of three to four people to meet weekly. The goal of the smaller groups is simple: holding ourselves and others accountable for living a Christ-honoring life.

Create smaller groups:

- Explain the importance of the smaller groups, emphasizing the goal.
- Allow group members to form their own initial groups of three by gender (men's smaller groups and women's smaller groups). This tends to work better than assigning groups.
- Allow groups to add one person from the names on the ministry list of people who are not present.
- You may want to encourage the groups to form based on neighborhoods or proximity to work.
- Make sure some of the groups have extra space for new group members and guests.
- As the Bible study group grows, you may need to reorganize the smaller groups, but try not to regroup too often so that trust can be built within each smaller group.

Support the smaller groups:

- Provide opportunities for the members of the smaller groups to pray with each other during the group time.
- Make study assignments in the weekly group time based on the smaller groups.
- Pre-enlist a volunteer to share with the larger group how participation in the smaller group is impacting his or her life.
- Periodically organize fellowship events built around the smaller groups. The smaller groups could be the basis for teams during the event.

Be in a smaller group:

- Meet with two or three other Bible study leaders as part of your weekly preparation.
- Be part of a smaller group within your class.
- Host a smaller group for guests and new group members.

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Building Disciples by Apprenticing Other Leaders

Starting new groups is critical to the life of your church and the lives of the individuals in your group. There are people in your group who need to be challenged to take on a greater role in your church. Providing the opportunity to do so helps them grow and removes the largest barrier to starting new Bible study groups—finding a leader for a new group. You can make a difference in the growth of individual group members and in the future growth of your church by apprenticing potential group leaders. Here's how you can use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* to make this happen.

- **Step 1:** Ask a group member to follow along in the Leader Helps for that session as you lead the group. Tell him or her to note what you did and what you adjusted. You are not providing a different book; you're just encouraging your apprentice to use the book he or she has in a different way. Ask this person to do this before arriving for the weekly group time.
- **Step 2:** After that group experience, spend time with the group member going over what you did and how you adjusted the leader material for the group.
- **Step 3:** Invite him or her to do this again in a few weeks.
- **Step 4:** Ask him or her to lead a group time or part of one using the suggestions in the Leader Helps for that session. You may be away that week, or you can simply observe as a group member. Offer to help him or her prepare if needed.
- **Step 5:** As your apprentice gains confidence, allow him or her to teach more in the near future.
- **Step 6:** As a need for a new group surfaces, prepare to move on to lead the new group, with the apprentice becoming the leader of the current group (which tends to work best), or commission the apprentice and a few others from the group to start a new group. Either way, the apprentice will be using the book he or she already uses, just in a different way.
- **Step 7:** Do it all again.

Not everyone in the group will become a Bible study leader. For those who do, you can become a mentor to potential leaders, extending your teaching ministry and demonstrating discipleship.

Planned

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: As the group arrives, invite a show of hands from those who like shopping at yard sales, flea markets, or thrift stores. Call for volunteers to name their best second-hand “find.”

RESPOND: Read the first paragraph on page 13, and ask the following question: *What items have you repurposed that were once viewed as used up or useless?* Note that while we may not have thought of it that way, when we buy a used or seemingly worthless item and repurpose it for use again, we are demonstrating the idea of redemption.

TRANSITION: Explain that while shopping a yard sale may help us understand something of the concept of redemption, it’s through looking at God’s plan that we most fully understand redemption. *In today’s study, we’ll examine how God sent an angel to tell a man named Zechariah the good news of God’s redemptive plan.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Explain that the group is beginning a study of Luke. Summarize the Introduction to Luke 1–9 on page 8 of this resource. Direct attention to **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Themes in Luke*), encouraging the group to look for these themes throughout the study. Direct the group’s attention to **Pack Item 2**

(*Outline of Luke*) displayed on the wall. (The full outline is on page 9.) Note the first outline point as you transition into today’s study.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the information in Understand the Context (p. 13). Note that Luke’s Gospel begins with the account of two unique births, each a part of the unfolding of God’s redemption story.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud Luke 1:13-17, while the group listens for the details of the angel’s message to Zechariah. Use the information from Explore the Text (p. 15) to help explain how Zechariah had been chosen to serve in the holy place of the temple on that particular day.

- **(1:13)** Zechariah and his wife may have thought of giving up many times. Like many childless couples, they longed to have a baby. Yet, their prayers had not been answered. Zechariah and his wife came from the priestly lineage of Aaron. He knew God’s history of faithfulness to Abraham and continued to offer his prayer even though, like Abraham, he had grown old.
- **(1:16)** Some prophets spoke to the nations, declaring the judgment of the One True God and calling them to repentance. John, however, would concentrate on the *children of Israel*. This focus did not mean God was uninterested

in the Gentiles but that salvation was for the Jews first and then also to the Gentile nations (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 15:21-28).

IDENTIFY: Focus on verses 13-14. Based on the angel's words, lead the group to identify Zechariah's prayer. Note that the Bible tells us that his wife, Elizabeth, couldn't conceive, and that they were older than childbearing years. Zechariah may have been praying this prayer for many years.

ASK: *How does the announcement to Zechariah compare to how God might answer our prayers today?*

IDENTIFY: Focus on verses 15-17. Call for the group to name the details revealed about this promised child. Invite them to point out the Old Testament prophecies found in these verses, using the Day 2 Daily Exploration (p. 17), for assistance.

DISCUSS: *How did connecting the birth of John to Old Testament prophecy communicate the importance of this child? How does connecting our prayers to Scripture help us understand how God's answers relate to His redemptive purposes?* (p. 15)

HIGHLIGHT: Note that verse 17 is this week's memory verse. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*), encouraging the group to memorize the verse.

STUDY: Place the group into pairs. Call attention to the Bible Skill (p. 15), and direct the pairs to work together comparing the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth with the Old Testament story of Elkanah and Hannah. Invite volunteers

to share their findings. Then ask: **What prayers have you been asking that seem to go unanswered? In what way do you see God's plan in the way He has responded to your prayers?**

TRANSITION: *God's ultimate plan for John was to announce the coming of Jesus.*

READ: **Direct a volunteer to read Luke 1:18-20 aloud**, while the group focuses on Zechariah's doubts and the angel's response to those doubts.

- **(1:20)** Using the phrase *now listen*, the angel wanted Zechariah to pay attention and understand what was about to happen. Zechariah had demanded some kind of proof to validate what he had been told. Amazingly, the word of an angel was not enough. Therefore, a sign was given, but it was not the kind that Zechariah wanted. His doubt had penalties. The difficulty he was about to experience was a direct result of the fact that he did not believe Gabriel's words.

DISCUSS: *How can doubt get in the way of a person enjoying God's promises? What kinds of things cause us to struggle with doubt in our faith?*

EXPLORE: Focus on verses 19-20. Using the Day 3 Daily Exploration (p. 18), explore the meanings of the words "sent" and "good news" in verse 19. Stress that the good news the angel brought to Zechariah was the gospel message that God has a redemptive plan for His creation.

DISCUSS: *Can a person be devoted to the Lord and still express doubt? How can doubt sometimes result in greater faith?* (p. 15)

TRANSITION: *God's promises are not "wish for" or "hope for" ideas; God has the power to do what He promises to do.*

READ: Direct the group to read

Luke 1:21-25 silently, considering the consequences of Zechariah's doubt.

- **(1:22)** After the angel departed, Zechariah was left speechless—literally! Stunned by his experience, his countenance was different as he emerged from the holy place.
- **(1:23)** Priests served in the temple on a rotating basis. They were divided into twenty-four groups, each named after a particular head of their clan among the descendants of Aaron (1 Chron. 24:7-18). Zechariah was in the division associated with Abijah (Luke 1:5). Each priest served from Sabbath to Sabbath.
- **(1:24)** Luke does not specify the time period represented by the phrase *after these days*. Doubtless, when Zechariah returned home, Elizabeth was confused by her husband's inability to speak. As he did when he later confirmed his son's name (Luke 1:63), Zechariah likely wrote his incredible story as his amazed wife looked on.
- **(1:25)** Being childless bore a sense of *disgrace* or social stigma *among the people*. It also carried a connotation of lack of favor from God. Now, both aspects of dishonor had been removed under the tender grace of the Lord.

GUIDE: Invite the group to name aloud the things that had happened since Zechariah entered the holy place in the temple to burn the incense. Note that Zechariah's time of service in the temple lasted one week.

ASK: *Why was it important for Zechariah to complete his time of service? How might this have helped him process what Gabriel had revealed to him?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Direct the group to review Luke 1:13-25, thinking about the ways we see God's promises pointing to His redemptive plan in Zechariah's story.

DISCUSS: *What are some of the promises of God that you are still awaiting? How does patience and time only enhance the anticipation of the fulfillment of that promise?* (p. 15)

RESPOND: Before the group time, choose one of the question sets under Apply the Text (p. 16). Lead the group to respond to the selected questions by jotting down a response in the margin of their Personal Study Guides. Encourage volunteers to share a response.

PRAY: Conclude the group time with prayer, thanking God for His plan of providing a way of salvation for every one of us who chooses to put our faith in Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by contacting any group members who have been absent, letting them know a new study is starting and inviting them to join the group time.