



SENT

a study through the book of

LUKE

Introduction

Welcome to our SENT study through Luke's Gospel! Luke is a really intense book which gives us a really clear picture of how radical Jesus' love is for this world. There's lots of great stories in Luke – from the Prodigal Son (in Luke 15) to the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) to the Resurrection (Luke 24) and more! Luke has more parables than any other gospel. It has more to say about wealth than any other gospel. It is both a book that is awe-inspiring and convicting.

This study focuses the eight main themes in Luke's gospel, and therefore is just a snapshot of a much bigger story. These themes, we think, capture this idea of what it means for you and I as God's people to be SENT into this world for His glory. For that reason, we highly encourage you to read through the study each week BEFORE you meet with your Community Group. There is so much packed into these eight sessions that it would be helpful for you to be prepared to dive into your discussions. As always the studies will be complemented by our Luke sermon series; though you don't have to hear the sermon to do the study (but it helps).

Finally, before you jump in, PRAY. The end goal of Bible studies is not to simply walk away saying "I know more" but to be transformed! My prayer for you is that through this study you may know, discover and be energized so that you are SENT into your world to live a passionate out-loud faith. Amen!

WEEK ONE:

Sent to Turn the World Upside Down

Read Luke 6:17-26

This is the (introduction to) the “sermon on the plain” – probably a revised version of Jesus’ sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7) to a new audience. Here we find Jesus teaching on what it means to live for him as his followers.

How, do you think, does Jesus’ teaching here relates with the values of our current culture?

What possible sense is there in saying “blessed” or “happy” (another translation of that word) are those who are economically poor, actually hungry, in grief and hated? How can that work out?

Does the descriptions in 6:24-26 describe you? What then, does this mean for you?

Jesus’ message and mission in Luke’s gospel is for the broken – which includes not only those who are spiritually broken (sinful people), but socially broken (the outcast/foreigner), materially broken (the poor), physically broken (the sick/disabled), etc. Now here we find teaching from Jesus that tells us if we live in such a way where we cannot identify with people such as these, where we are so incredibly UNLIKE and UNFAMILIAR with them in every way – we are in danger.

How do we reconcile this with our situation as relatively affluent citizens of the Northern Beaches? Do we simply ignore this? Do we spiritualize it (so like in Matthew 5 the “poor” instead becomes “poor in spirit”) so it’s easier to swallow? Or should this challenge us to an entirely new understanding of discipleship?

Read Luke 7:36-50.

What is happening in this narrative?

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

Many times throughout the gospels, Jesus is “called out” by the religious leaders of the day (namely the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees) for fraternizing with the “wrong” crowd. This happens in this story, as well as with people like Levi, Zacchaeus, and many others. In ancient Palestine (but this is really no different than our culture today) – if you hung out with someone, that person’s reputation/fame/sin/guilt/issues were thought to be infectious. Jesus was therefore called a rather derogatory term: a friend of sinners. Though that phrase resonates with us today, it was an indictment of Jesus and his character. Yet despite this label, Jesus kept choosing the “wrong” people to meet up with. He explains why in Luke 6:27-36. Thankfully, he wasn’t swayed from this mission (otherwise we’d be in trouble!). But why don’t we do this as Jesus’ followers today very often?

This woman (commonly thought to be Mary Magdalene) is, when you visualize it, is both greatly embarrassing herself and doing something incredibly beautiful. Breaking into someone’s house, weeping uncontrollably, and washing someone’s dirty feet with her hair appears humiliating and most likely would have seemed rather pathetic to the onlookers in the house (as evidenced by the response in verse 39).

But according to Jesus – what is this woman actually doing (see verse 47)?

How are Simon the Pharisee and this woman contrasted in verses 44-46?

Jesus indicates (and Simon confirms this in verse 43), that this woman has this crazy, passionate love for Jesus (and who cares less about how she’s perceived by the world) because she realizes she’s been immensely forgiven of her brokenness and sin.

Going back to verse 47, how does love for Jesus relate to forgiveness?

What does YOUR love for Jesus look like?

This verse says the more you realize you’ve been forgiven, the more you’ll love Jesus (not caring how crazy everyone else may think you to be). Think about your life – how often do you revel in the forgiveness God has given you in Jesus? (Hint: you can figure out the answer by how passionately you love Jesus).

This portion of Luke's gospel is about God's kingdom being unveiled in Jesus. It looks like the broken being sought and restored. It involves turning the world's values on their heads. And to be a part of this kingdom we will, like Jesus, seek out, identify with and love those who are unlike us, those who may even be our enemies. This obedience to Jesus, as we just discovered, is inherently connected not to legalism (obeying for the sake of obeying) but understanding and responding to Jesus' great love for us.

Based on Jesus' life and teachings thus far in Luke, what do you think the Christian life actually looks like? (Has Jesus said anything about merely attending church and a Bible study?).

Does your life right now reflect any part God's kingdom that has been revealed by Jesus here?

In what small way can you live out God's kingdom in your world THIS WEEK? Be specific!

A CONFESSION

I (Travis), had never really studied Luke's Gospel until I had a course on it in Bible college. In that course we simply read the text and then talked about what it meant. For the first time in my life, I discovered that my version of the Christian life looked like everyone else on this planet, with maybe the exception of trying a little harder not to sin. When I really grasped Jesus' words, I was convicted to the core and felt a huge sense of inadequacy in my faith - that I hadn't been living this out correctly. But guilt and fear and shame are not ever mentioned as motivators for a walk with Jesus - love is. So I slowly learned that before I could take Jesus' words seriously, I needed to grow in my love for him first. This love, then, made me more passionate about the things he is passionate about. This study is meant to demonstrate there is more to following Jesus than we think, but not to make anyone feel inadequate. Which leads to one final question:

How can you grow in your love for Jesus TODAY? This week? This term? Think in terms of any human relationships you're trying to nurture - how do you know and love Jesus more?

WEEK TWO:

Sent to Follow Despite The Cost

Read Luke 9:18-27.

The story immediately preceding this one involves a large crowd of people (of 5,000 men, not counting women and children) who are hanging off of Jesus' every word, who will not let him rest because they are so intent on being near him. They are described in 9:11 as "following" Jesus.

When Jesus and the disciples finally do get away, Jesus is curious to know about how he is perceived (v. 18 - "Who do the crowds say I am?").

Who do the crowds say Jesus is? What is the significance of these figures?

Who does Peter say Jesus is?

CHRIST IS NOT A LAST NAME

The word that is often translated as "Christ" in the New Testament is itself a rendering of the Hebrew word "Messiah". The word "messiah" basically means "anointed one" and was used in several places in the Hebrew scriptures to describe someone who was specially chosen by God and given His Spirit to do some significant task. Saul, David, Solomon and even the Persian king Cyrus are all called "messiahs" in the Old Testament. Yet during the exile (when the Jews lost their land and were taken away as slaves to foreign nations), the term "messiah" came to be understood as something more. Faithful Jews re-read ancient scriptures and realized that God had promised, from the very beginning of His Word, that He Himself was going to return and set everything right again. The prophets pick up on this idea to talk about how the Messiah, God Himself, was going to come to earth soon. There were many people who came and went who called themselves the Messiah/Christ, whose main claim on the role was the elimination of the "enemies" - who could be anyone from foreigners to sinners. The understanding of the "Messiah" then, was God in human form come to set up His kingdom on earth, loved by and rewarding all faithful Jews and making "everyone else" suffer.

What is the difference between the popular perception of the role and person of the Christ/Messiah and Jesus' understanding?

Why (most likely) do you think the crowds (and the disciples) “followed” Jesus?

Jesus then goes on to describe what “following” the Messiah actually looks like in verses 23-27. What four things does Jesus say a follower of his does?

What does “taking up your cross daily” mean? What did the cross mean to that audience back then?

Being completely honest, does Jesus’ description of a disciple here look like your life in any way? Why or why not?

What do you think Jesus means when he says “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it?” What does that look like daily?

In what ways do you try to “gain the whole world” instead of denying yourself and following Jesus?

Read Luke 9:46-48.

Immediately after Jesus instructs the disciples in what it means to follow him, what do we find them doing that demonstrates they really don’t get what he means?

What logical sense is there that in God’s kingdom the least will be the greatest? What does that look like in the Christian life?

Read Luke 9:57-62.

Once more, we are confronted with another crowd of people who are interested in “following” Jesus. Why do you think Jesus is so harsh on these potential followers? Why can’t he lower the bar a bit?

LET THE DEAD BURY THEIR OWN

This response from Jesus (verse 60) on first glance seems like an insensitive insult. Here is a guy who seems to want to follow Jesus, who simply wants to bury his dad – why is Jesus so rough on the dude? But that’s not the right context. In the Jewish world, when someone died, their bodies would be laid in a tomb for around a year (we see this in Jesus’ and Lazarus’ deaths). After a year (when their bodies had decomposed), the family would then gather the bones and put them in a box (called an ossuary) and bury it in the ground. So when this man said he wanted to “bury his father” he was talking about burying the ossuary way after the event – so this excuse, though still an important thing to do in that culture, doesn’t have the significance we often assign to it. The man could have buried the box whenever and unlike the burial tomb, was not as important to attend to.

Given all these passages, what distinguishes a “crowd-type” follower from a follower Jesus actually desires?

What kind of follower of Jesus are YOU?

If following Jesus means denying oneself, dying to our own desires or expectations or future; if it involves becoming nobodies and losing our lives (both in a spiritual sense and physical sense) – does your life reflect this at all?

And if the cost is so high (we are supposed to give up everything we want to hold on to), why follow Jesus? Or do you think we can sort of follow Jesus a little bit and still do what we want to do and look like everyone else?

What may you need to give up to follow Jesus? What do you think will happen if you surrender your hopes/dreams/future/plans/treasures for him?

WEEK THREE:

Sent to the Broken

“The true atheist is the one who refuses to see God’s image in the face of their neighbour.”

Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*

Read Luke 4:14-30.

If you read through any of the gospels and even into the book of Acts, it is clear that both Jesus and his followers spent a large percentage of their time with the marginalized. This set of people included the following: the sick, the elderly, the poor, the outcast, the foreigner, the “sinner”, children, widows, the “enemy”, those of differing religious and/or cultural beliefs and practices, and the unlovely and un-lovable.

Why do you think that Jesus (in his first ministry appearance in Luke’s gospel) starts here? Why not talk about getting people in church or believing the right things or establishing suitable worship practices or the importance of good coffee during morning tea?

At the beginning of his ministry in Luke’s gospel, 4:18-21 serves as explaining Jesus’ mission – how the kingdom of God works and who is included. From these verses, who seems to be at the forefront of Jesus’ work? Why do you think that is? Why these people?

What is the response of people in verse 22 to Jesus’ statement?

In verses 24-27, what exactly is Jesus saying that gets the crowd so furious at him (verses 28-30)? (Hint: it involves the ethnicity of the people mentioned by Jesus who are healed)

What is Jesus therefore saying his mission/kingdom is about? Who is invited? Why is this infuriating to Jesus’ Jewish audience?

What might this scene look like if it happened in our church today?

In Luke 4:31-5:31, we see Jesus' mission play itself out in real life. Have a quick look through these verses. What types of people is Jesus spending his time with?

FISHERS OF PEOPLE

Simon Peter is one of the first invitees into God's kingdom in 5:1-11. Though it's a bit harder to see, Peter also fits into the category of people whom Jesus mentioned as especially important to God's kingdom in chapter 4. Fishermen, like many whose work involved animals, were regarded as "low" on the social scale of that time. Ancient Jewish society held the priests and rabbis (Jewish spiritual teachers) as the most prominent. Most Hebrew boys would have had some level of instruction in the Jewish Law as they grew up, but only the best of the best were chosen to be disciples of the rabbis or understudies of the priests. If you didn't make the cut, most often you would fall back onto the family business – which is what we see Peter doing as a fisherman. So when Jesus (an up and coming Jewish teacher) calls Peter, Peter drops his nets, leaves everything behind and follows Jesus. Why? Because Peter, like the others Jesus spends time with in these chapters, is a societal "reject" who has been given a second chance to be somebody in God's kingdom. Peter's response then becomes the example of what it means to know and follow Jesus – an example some people easily follow (the poor, sinners, etc.) and others struggle with great difficulty (the rich, the religious elite). When you think about Jesus' call on your life – is your response more like Peter's or like the Pharisees?

Read Luke 5:27-32.

Levi, also called Matthew (and probably the author of Matthew's gospel) was a Jewish tax collector. A tax collector's job was to take money from Jewish citizens and give it to Rome (the hated empire that ruled over the Jews). And in order to make a profit for themselves, tax collectors would often over-tax the people so they could keep some for themselves. Many (like Zacchaeus in chapter 19) became rich in this profession – by basically stealing money and giving money to the enemy. Because of this, tax collectors thought to be in a whole different category of sin and judgment.

Levi does not exactly fit into the categories Jesus described earlier – he's not poor or sick – so why does Jesus call him?

How does Levi respond to Jesus? What FOUR things does the text tell us Levi does?

RESURRECTION ALREADY?

When we are told Levi “got up” (NIV translation), the original word in Greek there is the same word that describes the resurrection. So the text is literally saying Levi “was raised up” or “resurrected” when he responded to Jesus.

Why do you think Levi responds this way?

If Jesus is all about calling the poor, the sinner, the people who you would never usually find yourself associating with – what does that mean for us as people who claim to follow Jesus?

Jeremiah echoes Jesus in what it means to live for God and His kingdom. He says in Jeremiah 22:15-16 – “Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was just and right, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?’, declares the LORD.”

What does loving on the poor, needy, outcast, foreigner, sick, shut-ins, immigrants, “sinners” have to do with knowing and following Jesus?

If these verses (and Jesus) are to be believed, we should make it our utmost priority to reach out to the broken in our world through both our words and actions (as Jesus did).

Consider this quote from Shane Clairborne (a Christian activist) from his book *The Irresistible Revolution*: “I asked participants who claimed to be “strong followers of Jesus” whether Jesus spent time with the poor. Nearly 80 percent said yes. Later in the survey, I sneaked in another question, I asked this same group of strong followers whether they spent time with the poor, and less than 2 percent said they did. I learned a powerful lesson: We can admire and worship Jesus without doing what he did. We can applaud what he preached and stood for without caring about the same things. We can adore his cross without taking up ours. I had come to see that the great tragedy of the church is not that rich Christians do not care about the poor but that rich Christians do not know the poor.”

Does this at all speak to you? Do you actually know and care for someone who is poor, someone who is a refugee, someone who is desperate. If so, who are they? If not, what keeps you from doing this obviously important part of following Jesus?

WEEK FOUR:

Sent To Crazy Generosity

“Some years ago I was doing a seven-part series of talks on the Seven Deadly Sins at a men’s breakfast. My wife, Kathy, told me, ‘I’ll bet that the week you deal with greed will be the lowest attendance.’ She was right. People packed it out for ‘Lust’ and ‘Wrath’ and even for ‘Pride.’ But nobody thinks they are greedy. As a pastor I’ve had people come to me and confess that they struggle with almost every kind of sin. Almost. I cannot recall anyone ever coming to me and saying, ‘I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and people around me.’ Greed hides itself from the victim. The money god’s modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart.”

Timothy Keller, Counterfeit Gods

Read Luke 18:18-30.

ETERNAL LIFE

Today when we read stories like this one, we quickly jump to our own 21st century understanding of what “eternal life” means, which for many Christians simply means “knowing I will go to heaven after I die.” But Jesus’ era, heaven and eternal life didn’t exactly mean “life after death”. This phrase, eternal life, literally translates as “life in the age to come”, which should lead us to ask what that means. Most people in ancient times did not differentiate between a physical plane (earth) and a spiritual plane (heaven) – the two were intertwined so that normal everyday things then had deep spiritual meaning and purpose – every space was a sacred space. In addition, the Jews believed that one day God would come to earth Himself, making things right in this world. And if you were on God’s side, you got to be part of this re-creation and restoration of all things. This was called “life in the age to come” or being part of “the kingdom of God/heaven. So this man is essentially asking Jesus not how to guarantee heaven after he dies, but what he must do make sure he is included in the new glorious life with God that is coming – both now and into eternity.

How does Jesus respond to this man’s question (verse 20)? How does the rich man react (verse 21)? What is this man saying about himself?

If this man is living a good, ethical life (obeying the Jewish Law), why isn’t that enough?

Tim Keller, in his book *Center Church*, writes: “Christians often believe in their heads ‘Jesus accepts me; therefore I will live a good life,’ but their hearts and actions are functioning practically on the principle ‘I live a good life; therefore Jesus accepts me.’”

What’s the difference between these two ideas? Which one is happening in the rich man’s life? Which one does your life currently reflect?

Why do you think Jesus asks this man to sell everything and give up all his wealth in order to experience “life in the age to come”? Why isn’t living a good “religious” life enough? What would you do if Jesus asked you to give up everything you have in order that you may experience eternal life?

Do you think this passage applies to you (giving up everything you have to follow Jesus)? Why or why not?

Read Luke 19:1-10.

Zacchaeus is a tax collector, who (in an earlier study) we discovered are considered traitors, cheats and egregious sinners (verse 7).

What does Zacchaeus do when he meets Jesus? How does this compare to the rich ruler in chapter 18? Why do you think Zacchaeus acted this way?

What is Jesus’ response to Zacchaeus’ actions? What, in Jesus’ words, did Zacchaeus receive that day?

How come Zacchaeus was praised (and promised “salvation”) for only giving up half of his possessions, while the rich ruler was asked to give up ALL his possessions/wealth? How is that fair?

So as Christ followers – what are we supposed to do with our stuff and our wealth? Give it all up? Half of it up? Ten percent? A little bit? Are we allowed to be rich? Should we be poor?

Read Luke 16:1-15.

What in the world is going on in this passage?

This, believe it or not, is Jesus' most clear response on how his followers are to view and use money and possessions.

Why does the master commend the manager who basically cheated him out of his wealth?

What principle is Jesus getting at in this passage (see verse 9)?

In verses 10-13, Jesus essentially says wealth doesn't really belong to you (verse 12), it's simply been temporarily entrusted to your care. And you can either worship and go after money (and therefore always be preoccupied by or consumed with it) or you can worship God and not really care at all about money, eagerly (and wisely) letting it slip through your fingers to serve God and others.

Going back to the rich man (in Luke 18) and Zacchaeus – given this understanding of money, how would you describe their views and reactions to Jesus?

A MONEY ISSUE OR A HEART ISSUE?

In Luke 16:19-31 there is a story of a "rich man" and Lazarus, a poor and suffering beggar. We are told that Lazarus lived outside the rich man's gates and longed to eat even the scraps that fell off the rich man's table (indicating that if Lazarus could visibly see the man, his food and his table, then the rich man would certainly have noticed Lazarus). Both men die at the same time and the rich man finds himself in agony in hell, while Lazarus is being comforted at Abraham's side (a shorthand way of saying "in paradise"). The rich man calls out from hell to Abraham asking for some relief from his current state, to which Abraham replies that in life, you (the rich man) received everything you needed, while Lazarus received only bad things. Many Christians use this passage to talk about how if you're rich, you're going to hell (it certainly seems that way in some of Jesus' teachings). However, this is a false interpretation of this parable. The moral is NOT all rich people go to hell and all poor people go to heaven (therefore we should all seek to be poor). The issue is that (like earlier in Luke 16), this rich man was not "wise" or "shrewd" with his money toward God and others. In other words, he had a HEART problem. The text indicates the rich man knew Lazarus by name (verse 24) and saw him suffering outside his house "every day" (verse 19) and yet did nothing but keep hoarding his wealth and using it for himself. This same heart issue is true of the rich man in Luke 18 and Zacchaeus (in the opposite way).

So, how does how you use/spend your money/stuff reflect the state of your heart?

What Jesus is getting at here (and Paul relates this very clearly in 2 Corinthians 8-9) is if our hearts beat for God, we'll be crazy generous. Because if God is the center of your life, money can have no hold over you and therefore you will use it all the more through acts of extreme generosity to demonstrate your love for Him and others. Like the parable of the treasure in the field, you say to yourself, "I have Jesus? Who cares about anything else! Take it all, I found the real treasure!" It is NEVER about guilt or giving more money because it makes God happier with you (legalism). This is why biblical teachings on money always want us to ask ourselves who we love most: God or wealth.

So again, based on how you spend/save/use your money/stuff – does that reflect a heart for God as most important, where you could care less about what you have because you have Jesus, or does it reflect the fact that money/stuff still has a hold over you?

What is one small step you can take this month to fall in love with Jesus more by holding onto your money less? If you don't know or you are at this stage unwilling to make any changes, that's fine – but state it out loud.

In what ways can your group do something that reflects a heart for God through crazy generosity together?

WEEK FIVE:

Sent to Be An Ambassador For God's Kingdom

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

Paul's basic thesis here is this:

1. Christ died for us to show us his love (v. 14)
2. If you accept this truth, it means you should no longer live for yourself (v. 15) AND you should no longer see the things as the world does (v. 16).
3. This means that to the rest of the world, you seem "out of your mind" (v. 13) because...
4. You are a new creation and therefore you represent and are being sent as an ambassador for Jesus to reconcile the world back to God (vv. 17-19).

With that in that in the back of your mind, read Luke 14:1-6.

THE TABLE

This section of Luke's Gospel revolves around conversations Jesus has that take place at a dinner party. In the Ancient Near East (and in most Eastern cultures today) culture and community centered around meals. The "table" was how you related to and learned from one another, as well as shared your life. The table was the center of the home and shaped like a 'U' – the bend being where the host sat and then those immediately near the host were where the honoured guests reclined. The ends of the table were for those who were either of least importance to the host or the community. Who you chose to invite to the table said a lot about yourself, so when having a meal, the host would want to invite people whose reputations/wealth/status would essentially rub off of him. This in turn meant that the host would purposefully not invite people who would taint his reputation/status.

Jesus was invited to the house of a "prominent Pharisee". What, at this point in the story, did this indicate about how Jesus was viewed?

But then a spanner is thrown into the works. Verse 2 literally translates as "[On Jesus' way to the house] a certain man was suffering from dropsy in front of him." Dropsy basically means unusual swelling of body parts, often from malnutrition or heart or liver failure. This event also happened to occur on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest.

How do the religious leaders react to Jesus' healing of this man?

What do you know about the Sabbath and how does that affect this story?

THE SABBATH

“Sabbath” literally means “rest” and is first mentioned in Genesis 2:1-3, when God “rests” from the work of creation. The Sabbath is then mentioned again as one of the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 as a day that is to be kept holy and free from work. In the original context, it was an apologetic against foreign cultures who did not have a “day off” – Sabbath meant not only rest but was about the value of human well-being. But during the Exile period (where the Jews were taken as slaves to Babylon and Assyria for their rejection of the LORD), there was a revival of Jewish devotion to the Law – that if the Jews strictly followed the Law, God would be pleased with them and give them land and blessing again. Fast-forward several centuries and various groups, notably the rabbinical teachers and Pharisees, begin defining what counted as “work” so that it was very clear how to not violate the Sabbath. From Exodus 31 there were 39 different activities that became prohibited to do on the Sabbath, but later rabbis added even more onto this list, such as not being able to walk more than a mile (see Matthew 5:41).

So Jesus is essentially asking what is the higher virtue in God’s Kingdom? Compassionate love or strict obedience to the Law?

In examining your own life, do you see your purpose as an ambassador for Jesus centered more around a) not sinning or b) showing extreme compassion to others? Where do you think Jesus falls on this issue?

Read Luke 14:7-11.

What is happening in this scene?

How does this passage relate to being an ambassador to this world for Christ?

Read Luke 14:12-14.

Describe your last dinner party you hosted. Who did you invite? Why?

Who does Jesus call you to invite? Have you ever done this? Why or why not?

We’ve seen this theme over and over and over again in Luke’s gospel (and it’s in practically every book of the Bible too). If this idea of welcoming and loving those who are considered “the least” is so prominent – why don’t we do it? Why don’t YOU do it?

What would it look like to love on those who are disabled, sick, have special needs, are refugees, foreigners or “sinners”?

Read Luke 14:15-24.

If you start to define this parable – who do all the characters represent? Who is the “certain man”? The excuse makers? The people who were not invited to the banquet but came?

What is this parable really about?

Who are YOU in this parable?

Luke finishes this chapter in verses 25-35. Here Jesus tells the crowds that if they are unwilling to count the cost (which means surrendering everything to follow him) then they are disqualified from being his disciples. Jesus is clear he does not want half-committed followers.

This chapter is what it looks like to be an ambassador for Jesus: to show extreme compassion, selfless humility and loving generosity to people who cannot possibly pay us back. How does this relate to Paul’s description of an ambassador from 2 Corinthians 5 (rewind to the beginning of this study)?

Does your life look at all like this description? What is one small step you can take to look more like an ambassador for God’s kingdom in this world?

In what way does your church fit this description? In what ways does it do this well? Not so well?

————— SOME THINGS YOU MIGHT CONSIDER: —————

The Welcome Dinner Project – a project that helps you to open your home and share a meal with newly arrived people into Australia who know and have no one.
<http://www.joiningthedots.org/initiatives/101>

Hope Street – a Baptist ministry for the homeless in Woolloomooloo.
<http://hopestreet.org.au/>

Luke 14 Disability Inclusive Christian Communities – an initiative that equips churches to be places of welcome and belonging for people and families living with disability
www.cmb.org.au/content/our-work/luke14

Street Mission – providing food for the homeless that runs cafes in Balgowlah (Saturday nights) and Dee Why (Wednesday nights)
www.streetmission.com.au

Grace City Care – a church run food care and op shop in Dee Why
http://gracecitychurch.net/Groups/1000094697/Grace_City_Church/community/community.aspx

Or speak with Travis Mundy about how you can be part of the Love Your Neighbour ministry at NBC!

WEEK SIX:

Sent To Prayer and Service

How would you describe your prayer life? (Frequent? Infrequent? Meaningful? Basic? Joyful? Monotonous?)

How effective would you say your prayer life is? Why do you think God answers your prayers or doesn't answer your prayers?

Read Luke 11:1-4.

How would you describe the seven sections of this prayer (see below)? What do they mean? Why are they important?

1. Father
2. Hallowed by Your Name
3. Your Kingdom come
4. Give us each day our daily bread
5. Forgive us our sins
6. [So that] we forgive everyone indebted to us ("indebted" is a more accurate word than "sins" here and implies not only those who do sinful things to us, but people who are actually financially in debt and owe us recompense – it's a much broader term implying total forgiveness on every level, spiritual and otherwise)
7. Lead us not into temptation

How does this prayer cover every aspect of our lives?

How does this prayer reflect a deep loving relationship with God (rather than a prayer we thoughtlessly throw up so our desires are met)?

How often do you pray this prayer?

YOU (IN GREEK)

One of the problems with translating from one language to another is that there is a loss of some level of meaning and context; this passage is an obvious example. The word “you” in English is normally directed at one other person who you are directly addressing (this is technically called “second person singular”). There are many instances in the Bible where we see the word “you” and commonly we read it as talking directly to me, personally. However, many of the “you” passages we see, in Greek, are actually PLURAL, meaning it is better translated as “you all” (or “yous” if you’re country Australian). In the Lord’s Prayer here, verse 2 should be translated as Jesus saying, “When you ALL pray” and indicates this prayer should be prayed corporately. It therefore highlights the importance of community, especially in our prayer lives, that we are not only to pray for our own needs as individuals, but we are encouraged over and over again in Scripture to recognize we are dependent on one another and that it is vitally important to share our lives and needs and struggles with one another before the throne of God.

Read Luke 11:5-13.

Immediately after teaching his disciples what to pray, he then tells them a strange parable about HOW to pray. What we often miss in this parable is the important of ancient hospitality. In that culture there were no late-night convenience stores and food was often prepared daily (rather than sitting in boxes or cans on shelves with long expiration dates). So whenever someone (a friend or a traveler or whoever really) was in need of food/water/shelter, it was considered not only rude, but sinful to not offer whatever hospitality you had, no matter what it cost you (see the parable of the Good Samaritan in the chapter immediately before this to see this at work).

That being said, what is the meaning of the parable in verses 5-8?

Why does the neighbour respond to his friend’s request (see verse 8)?

How does this parable flow into verses 9-13? How does this persistence relate to our prayer life with God?

Read Luke 18:1-8.

What is this parable about? (hint: Luke gives it away in verse 1)

How is God portrayed by Jesus in these passages? How is God both similar to and yet different than the neighbour (ch. 11) and the judge (ch. 18)?

How does your prayer life and dependence on God look like the friend (ch. 11) and the widow (ch. 18)? What attributes do they have? Would you describe your prayer life like this?

In Luke's gospel, prayer is talked about more than any of the other gospel accounts. In Jesus' life, Luke notes him praying in the moments when things are getting the most hectic (in both good and bad ways). He prayed when he was baptized, before he chose his disciples, during his transfiguration, before he was approached by Pharisees to question him, when he was in the garden of Gethsemane, as the guards took him prisoner and even on the cross itself.

Our world is so hectic that often all we think we have time for is a quick "check in" with the Father above who passionately cares for us. But in Luke's gospel, Jesus reminds us that prayer should arise from our deep love for God, despite the hectic circumstances going on around us – that we are to pray because we are loved, because God is supremely gracious and generous toward us, and we therefore should approach God regularly and with outrageous courage in our requests.

There are two things here: knowing and understanding God's love for us AND responding to that love through our devotion to Him.

What are some ways you can grow in the knowledge of God's love for you? How do you know you are loved and how do you think God's love can become clearer to you? Be honest.

What are some ways THIS WEEK that you can embolden and propagate your prayer life? What, practically does that look like on a daily level? Be specific!

The Bible never indicates that prayer should exist by itself, but in Scripture, prayer is always connected with some sort of response on the part of the person praying. In Luke, we see Jesus praying and then immediately going out and healing people or proclaiming the Good News or facing religious opposition. This pattern gets picked up in Luke's sequel, Acts. Luke wants his audience to know that not only is prayer vital (and we should pray often and pray boldly), but action should follow.

Read Acts 4:23-31.

How is prayer intertwined with passionate service for Jesus here?

The text says that after their bold prayer in community the place was "shaken"? Have you ever experienced anything like that? If not, why not?

Read Acts 4:32-37.

What happens immediately after this time of prayer? Are the believers merely waiting around for God to do something? Or are they responding in bold confidence, believing God is already at work answering their prayers?

Why is it that we often either pray, don't get an immediate answer and therefore give up OR we pray, don't get an answer and wait around, not doing anything until God gives us very clear writing in the sky? How are all these examples of prayer in the Bible unlike what we often do?

How is waiting on the Lord in prayer an awesome thing? How can it be detrimental to us doing anything for Jesus? Where can we find balance between the two?

————— SOME CHALLENGES TO TRY: —————

1. Keep a prayer journal. Record your prayers as they become apparent to you, with dates next to them. Over time, go back over past sections and if God has answered any prayers, write those dates in. This is a helpful way to keep a consistent prayer life, but also one that recognizes that God does in fact answer!
2. Start praying boldly. For God to reveal Himself to you. For Him to shape you to be more like Jesus. To find ways to use your gifts/passions/talents.
3. Find out how you can pray more with your community. As stated above, many Bible passages emphasize not only regular prayer life for individual believers, but we are called to pray as a family of God together. But we often lack in this area. Why not try starting a prayer ministry at church? Or being part of the McCready Project (Friday morning prayer time)?
4. If you are not involved in a regular ministry, pray about where you might get involved (Sunday school, Kids Arvo, youth, Bible reading, sound desk, coffee, Love Your Neighbour, prayer team, etc). But don't just pray and do nothing. Pray and take the initial steps to jump into a ministry. See where God takes you. Sometimes the answer to our prayer is actually "YES" because God clearly NOT telling us "NO" (this is how we see the apostles in Acts move forward).

WEEK SEVEN:

Sent to Diligent Readiness

Read Luke 12:35-40.

What is this “parable” about?

Jesus uses three different ways that showed how people in the ancient world readied themselves in verses 35-36:

“Be dressed ready for service” literally translates as “gird up your loins” and was a term used for soldiers who were gearing up for the immediate battle.

“Keep your lamps burning” can refer to several things, but most likely refers to a watchman on the walls keeping lookout for enemies or invaders.

“Like servants waiting” is fairly clear – it was the servants’ job to be awake and ready to serve their master no matter the lateness of the hour.

Jesus says then “it will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.” What is Jesus referring to here? Why will “it be good”?

In the second half of verse 37 it says, “Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.” Who is the “he” and who is the “them” Jesus is talking about? What does this say about us and God?

Read Luke 12:41-48.

Jesus again here talks about being prepared and ready, being found diligently at work waiting for the master’s return. He then describes four different types of servants and their recompense:

1. The servant who knows and does the master’s will (vv. 43-44)
2. The servant who does the exact opposite of the master’s will (vv. 45-46)
3. The servant who knows the master’s will but does not get ready or does nothing (v. 47)
4. The servant who does not know or do the master’s will (v. 48)

If you were to translate this parable in a church context, who would these servants be?

What is the outcome for each of these servants? Do you think these outcomes are justified?

If you were to take a hard look at your own life, which servant are you most like? Be honest!

Jesus finishes off these stories with this interesting line: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

With that in the back of your mind, turn to and *read Luke 19:11-27*.

AN UNWANTED KING

This parable has some precedence in historical events Jesus' audience would have been familiar with. In 4 B.C. a man named Archelaus, who was the son of King Herod the Great, went to Rome in order that he may gain Caesar's permission to continue on as King of Judea (modern day Israel). Archie was not as popular as his father and there was a public outcry to not grant him the position. Because of this Caesar made him an "ethnarch" instead (this is similar to a "governor" in modern language; someone who has some power but does not have ultimate authority).

The story of a man who "goes to a distant country" to only come back at an unknown time, who is unwanted by the people he is supposed to be king over also speaks about Jesus. Jesus went away to heaven after his resurrection and promised to return one day in judgment on how we responded to him. He was also unwanted by his own people, the Jews. So this parable is not only recognizable to his audience, its about Jesus' own kingdom and return.

After being proclaimed sovereign ruler, the king returns home and calls those who claimed to be his servants to account. He is curious to know what they have done with what the king had given to them. In Luke's version of this story (probably Jesus told this story to several audiences in various ways), the king gives his servants a "mina" which was equal to about 100 days worth of wages (based on average full-time wages in Australia in 2015 this would equate to about \$31,000).

What happens in the cases of the first and second servants (vv. 16-19)? What are they given? Why?

Read verse 20 again.

What is this servant's understanding of his master?

Does his knowledge of his master being a “hard man” and a cheat line up how he’s treated the first two servants?

Yet even with this “knowledge” of his master, what does (or doesn’t) the servant do? What does this communicate about how well he actually knows his master?

What is Jesus’ conclusion to this parable (v. 26)?

What is this parable about?

Again we have a parable about differing responses to the Jesus in light of his return. Two servants embrace what they’ve been given and use it to earn more for the master (and are rewarded with greater things and more opportunities). Another servant demonstrates that though he is somewhat associated with the king, never actually trusted him as a source of grace. And in one last chilling statement (v. 27), there are those who reject the king outright.

Over and over again in Luke’s gospel (and throughout the whole of Scripture) we are reminded that God’s work is not finished, that He will return and we are called to respond to the love God has shown us through Jesus with passionate service.

Let’s imagine Jesus returned today. And like the king/master in these parables, Jesus calls you forward to give an account for what you’ve done with what he’s given you, with how you’ve responded to his grace. This includes how you’ve loved him with your income, your time, your giftedness, your talents, your relationships, your position, etc.

What areas do you think God would find favor with you in? In what areas would he rebuke you?

The often overlooked detail in these stories is the generosity of the king, of Jesus. A king who instead of overlooking you, calls you and invites you into His kingdom, who is overjoyed when you respond to His love with action and obedience. It’s easy to focus on the punishment of the lazy servants and focus on that, but we’re missing the point. Jesus is indicating that you can have two responses to the king: you love him and desire to serve Him or you don’t (through disobedience or inaction). Which one describes you?

How can we as a group spur one another on to respond to God’s love in light of His approaching return? What do you area do you need to be better at serving Him and others with (your time, talent, treasures?).

WEEK EIGHT:

Sent With Passion and the Spirit

Read Luke 24:1-35

Why is the resurrection such a monumental event? (see Romans 1:4 and 1 Corinthians 15:13-14)

Even despite the fact that Jesus taught about his return (verses 7, 26), why do you think his appearance on Easter created such a shock to his followers?

Why do you think the two men on the road to Emmaus could not recognize Jesus? What made them realize it was him? Why is this significant?

What is the point of Scripture in this story (see verse 27)? What does every word in the Bible point us to?

What was the reaction these men had to Jesus walking with them, despite the fact they didn't recognize him at the time? What then did they do with this reaction (vv. 33-35)?

HEART? MIND? GUTS?

Verse 32 says these disciples hearts were burning within them. The word for “burning” is the word kaiomene, which literally means “to be set on fire”. Now when we read this story, we probably understand this to me something to the effect of “we felt butterflies in our stomach”. Our modern usage of the word “heart” is usually related to our feelings, our emotions. But not so in the first century. The place where you had strong feelings, where you had emotions was in your guts/bowels. The word “compassion” in Greek is the word splanchnon (isn't that fun to say?), which literally means your intestines (hence the butterfly in your stomach would make sense in Greek culture). The word for heart (Greek: kardia) actually is closer to what we call our “mind” today. It was the center of your thoughts, attitudes, the guidance system for your actions. So when these men said their hearts were burning within them, they did NOT mean that they felt a brief glimmer of excitement – for feelings are transitory. Rather, Jesus' resurrection stimulated their minds – caused them to think deeply and passionately about what had just happened and what to do about it, which is why they take action. The Bible never calls us to merely respond based on our emotions only (though it could easily be argued these men felt something in their guts!). Passion is not just a feeling thing, but a thinking thing, an action thing.

When you first deeply understood the resurrection, what, if anything, did that do to you? How did it impact your life?

Why is passion an appropriate response to what Jesus has done for us?

Read Luke 24:36-53.

Jesus appears to the larger group of disciples who are having some difficulty in understanding what is happening, thinking Jesus to be a ghost. He eats some fish (which ghosts cannot do). What then does Jesus do with his disciples?

Is he content to merely stop with a proper understanding of God's Word?

Jesus then outlines the threefold plan of God, two of which require the disciples' involvement:

1. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead
2. Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed to all nations
3. The promised Spirit will enter into the lives of those who follow Jesus

Notice that each part of this formula is dependent on the other parts: if Jesus did not rise from the dead, there is no forgiveness of sins. If there is no repentance, the Spirit cannot come into a person's life.

What this means is that because of Jesus death and resurrection, you have not only been forgiven, it means you have a job to do – to proclaim his name everywhere. And in order to do that, you must first be equipped with God's Spirit.

If then we are called to be witnesses for Christ and we have God's very Spirit inside of us equipping us for the task, why do we often refuse to share our faith in word and deed? What excuse do we have?

Author and pastor Francis Chan once said something to the effect of this: If someone came up to you and told you that possessed the spirit (and therefore ability) of Michael Jordan to play basketball, wouldn't you expect them to be phenomenally better than everyone else? That they would demonstrate skills and understand the game far better than the average person? If that person showed up on the court and merely played slightly better than he/she had before, wouldn't you question if he/she actually did have Jordan's spirit inside of them? In the same way, if we as Christians claim to have the Spirit of Jesus inside of us – wouldn't you expect our lives to look a whole lot different than everyone else? If the same Spirit that healed sicknesses, that enabled average people to reach thousands for Christ in powerful ways lived in you, wouldn't you expect your life to look a bit different?

What would you say to this statement?

Do you really believe Jesus has given you His Spirit?

In what ways have you seen the work of the Spirit in your own life?

In what ways do you think you do not allow yourself to be led by the Spirit?

What (in your group and for you personally) are some weekly goals you can strive for to be more obedient to the Spirit's guidance? What does that look like practically?

After working through Luke's Gospel, and especially the ending, I (Travis) felt very excited to be sent with passion in God's Spirit – but I didn't know exactly what was next. A kind of book like Luke's Gospel should propel us onwards (which is why Luke writes "Acts" to demonstrate the story does not end but must keep going). As we have wrestled with these issues these past weeks, I'd like to hone and direct my attention toward Jesus in practical ways that will impact my life every single day. So below I've listed a few books and ideas that have helped me continue this journey, and I hope they help you as well!

Read

“Surprised by Hope” by NT Wright. A book about the NOW-ness of God’s kingdom and what it looks like to be a part of what God is doing in the present.

“The Forgotten God” by Francis Chan. A comprehensive study on the Holy Spirit. But more than just theological, it helps you to follow the Spirit practically.

“Radical” by David Platt. Megachurch pastor who, along with his church, has been greatly challenged by God’s Word to live a radical life in this world for Jesus.

“Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger” by Ron Sider. A convicting book about wealth, poverty and what it means to take Jesus’ words on generosity seriously.

Do

Find a friend (maybe someone in your Community Group) that you can meet up with regularly, not only to pray, but to spur one another on and challenge each other’s walk with the Lord. It is very difficult on our own to hold ourselves accountable in our spiritual growth. Find someone who will pray for you persistently and speak boldly into your life.

Get involved in a ministry. Over and over again in Luke’s gospel it is clear we are called to serve God and others – if we don’t we’re wasting what God has given us. If you don’t know where or how to serve, talk about it in your Community Group or with one of the church elders – we have training and mentoring available and would LOVE to help you discover your gifts and passions.

Establish regular spiritual habits that you can practice within your daily life. We often separate our “Jesus time” (Sunday church service, weekly Bible study) with our “every day life” time (work, family, travel, school, friends, sports). Those two things should not be mutually exclusive. What would it look like to incorporate your walk with Jesus during your soccer match or in your workplace? Books like “Celebration of Discipline” by Richard Foster or “Spirit of the Disciplines” by Dallas Willard are really helpful in discovering every day things you can do to find Jesus in the ordinary. “Every Good Endeavor” by Tim Keller is really helpful in thinking about work and the Christian life. Check them out or chat with a church leader to help you think through these issues.

Go, Give, Pray. All of us can do one of those things (most of us can do all of them). Whether it’s signing up for a mission trip, sponsoring a child from Baptist World Aid, praying regularly for an outreach ministry (like Open Doors or World Vision, amongst others) or setting aside an amount of your income to give to NBC missionaries, we all can do something to demonstrate God’s love to a broken world. We are called to see beyond our Northern Beaches lives and be God’s hands and feet within our community, our country and our world, especially to those who are in greatest need. We’ve already listed many ideas in the earlier studies, but make sure you get connected in a real way to God’s love for His world.

Be

Probably, before doing anything, is to spend time with Jesus. To be with him and understand his immense love for you. That’s where it all starts and ends. Read through Luke’s gospel. Internalize it for yourself. Spend time not just reading, but praying and listening, asking God to make Himself real. Ask Him to show you His love for you.