

Introduction

This supplement has grown out of a need for more specific material than what is in the companion volume, *Evangelism Toolbox*. Many people have benefited from that booklet but have asked for lesson outlines that could actually be used by teachers in a class situation. The lessons in the previous work were mostly in narrative form and were somewhat suggestive. What follows here is more comprehensive and user-friendly.

These outlines are intended to be used with the Biblical text in evangelistic work. They are specifically designed to build faith in unbelievers, or to repair the defective faith of those who have embraced religious error. The original plan grew out of a Luke-Acts reading program in which every verse of every chapter was read. Over time, I have defaulted to my favorite (and, perhaps, most effective) life-changing paragraphs. This has enabled me to streamline the studies, focus only on certain key sections, and have my students read the portions not covered in class between sessions.

For roughly two decades, I have used Ecclesiastes to generate the initial interest, Luke to build faith, and Acts to show people what to do with that faith. It is an approach that has led to scads of baptisms (I stopped counting long ago). **Warning:** use this approach only if you are committing to converting a lot of people to Christ!

Here are a few preliminary suggestions for teachers:

- This material is intended to supplement the ideas found in *Evangelism Toolbox*. For helpful ideas on how to proceed, I encourage you to obtain a copy of that booklet.
- If you are teaching these outlines in a group context, encourage participation on the part of all. Don't lecture! Allow people to discover truth for themselves, with a little "help" from you.
- At the beginning of each class, spend some time talking, smiling, and putting people at ease. Be genuine in your love for people.
- When you begin the study, have students read the paragraphs with you. In group studies, I usually ask people to read a verse apiece, unless they want to "pass" to the next person.
- The best way to generate discussion in a group setting is to ask leading questions after reading a text: *What does this statement mean? Why does Jesus do that? Etc.*
- If the ideas wander too far off the beaten path, step in and reign in the discussion with material from the outlines.
- Be sympathetic but firm in your convictions. Others need to see people who are passionate about their faith in God's Word.

There are many lessons in this supplemental guide. Should you cover them all?

- That depends on the student's needs, as well as your familiarity with the material. I like to adapt the approach slightly to the needs of the folks with whom I'm

studying. A Roman Catholic, a Southern Baptist, and an agnostic have different needs. Personalize your approach somewhat.

- If you can “skip” a few lessons, and make the same amount of progress, feel free to do so.

The two most important suggestions:

- Use the outlines, but don't over-use them. The best approach is to read the text, ask the right questions, and let the Text itself do the converting.
- Always remember that winning people to Christ involves building faith in people (Rom. 10:17). Use the sword of the Spirit to penetrate people's hearts. Every Biblical paragraph highlighted in this material has the power to build at least one of the three subcomponents of faith:
 - Evidence to build **Conviction**
 - A trustworthy Savior to build **Trust**
 - Clear-cut directions which lead to **Surrender**

How will you know if you are making progress?

- You will see hardened hearts beginning to bend, in some cases.
- People's interest will start to rise.
- Some will start asking all the right questions.
- Others will even demand an accelerated pathway to their own conversions.

One thing I know for sure: **Ecclesiastes, Luke, and Acts are powerful, God-given tools for converting the lost!** The gospel has lost none of its power (Rom. 1:16). If this material can help you present it, use it to God's glory!

Our Purpose in Life

Lesson 1

[Note to Teacher: This lesson, on Ecclesiastes, is designed to build interest and rapport with just about anyone. Use this material to “set the tone” for a productive class.]

I. The Cyclical Nature of Life -- Eccl. 1:1-11

A. Three illustrations:

1. Sunrise, sunset -- v. 5
2. Circular courses of the wind -- v. 6
3. The evaporation cycle -- v. 7

B. Life is like an endless race track, but are we really getting anywhere?

1. Generations come and go, but life goes on...
2. There's nothing new under the sun.... Even with the passing of time, it's business as usual! (“Been there, done that”)
3. cf. 3:1-11, which prompted the lyrics, “There is a season... Turn, turn, turn”

II. The Emptiness of Worldly Preoccupations -- 2:1-11

A. With the drive of a type-A personality, the author tries to break the endless cycle by embarking on a grand Search for Happiness

1. He has it all: fame, power, money and women (cf. I Kings 4:21-34; 10:1,7; 11:3)
2. Unfortunately, his frame of reference is rather selfish (notice how often “for myself” is repeated in vv. 4-8)
3. How would most people answer the question: “If I only had _____, then I'd be happy!”(?)

B. Here was a man with “everything”! Was he happy? NO!

1. He was miserable! None of these pursuits brought lasting fulfillment.
2. Everything is “vanity” and “striving after wind”

III. The Inescapable Conclusion -- 12:1-8,13-14

A. The brevity of life

1. “Childhood and the prime of life are fleeting” -- 11:10
2. We're all getting older, and the grave awaits -- 12:1-8

B. The compelling conclusion is that this life is a probationary period for a day of reckoning, beyond which we will be rewarded or punished -- 12:13-14

1. The God who grants you life and breath has invested your life with infinite purpose and meaning.
2. Whether or not you take advantage of your opportunity is of vital importance
3. Why do you exist? To “fear God and keep His commandments”

4. In all this, we have failed miserably and need a Savior....

C. Driving the point home

1. Can our lives be have any purpose and meaning in the absence of accountability before God?

2. If you take Judgment Day out of the picture (as in life “under the sun”), then we are nothing but specks of dust on a revolving ball in a solar system, in a much bigger galaxy, in a universe so gigantic that it staggers the imagination. I.e., *we aren't worth very much!*

3. On the other hand, with an ultimate day in court with the Almighty awaiting us, with eternity hanging in the balances, then every word, deed, and thought are suddenly invested with eternal importance.

4. The point is that our inherent worth and value are inextricably tied to the Judgment. There's no getting around it!

Introduction to Luke

Lesson 2

Read Luke 1:1-4.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called Gospels -- Biblical accounts of the life of Jesus Christ.

Luke was a medical doctor (Col. 4:14) and companion of the apostle Paul. The Gospel of Luke is the first volume of a two-part work (Acts is the sequel).

I. Why this little introduction is significant: *because it counteracts skeptical notions about the four Gospels and how they were put together.*

A. Many skeptical critics presume to redefine the purpose of the four Gospels, in such a way as to attack their integrity.

1. A standard line of unbelievers is that the early Christians exaggerated in reporting what Jesus did, and that the Gospels are more “theological” than historical.
2. One group of revisionist historians, with an agenda to malign Luke, says he “was not an academic historian attempting to achieve an historically accurate picture.” In their view, the Gospels are “folklore” that cannot be trusted.

B. Fortunately, we do not have to rely on someone else to tell us why Luke wrote. He tells us himself, in his own words! The introduction we’ve just read (1:1-4) establishes four basic points:

1. The life of Jesus was so momentous, even when eyewitnesses were still around, that Luke speaks of the “the things accomplished (fulfilled) among us”;
2. The “eyewitnesses,” he adds, “delivered them to us”;
3. These powerful events did not remain *word of mouth*, as many had already “undertaken to compile a narrative”; and
4. Luke’s unequivocal aim was that the reader might “know the exact truth” (“have certainty”).

C. To this end, he cross-checked his sources, “having investigated everything carefully from the beginning.”

1. I.e., he did the kind of research a historian does.
2. Like a good detective, he collected firsthand information in order to reconstruct exactly what happened.
3. How do fairy tales begin? (“Once upon a time...”). Is that how the Gospel of Luke reads? (cf. 3:1)

II. What this means to you

A. Luke was only one step removed from eyewitnesses, and he was in contact with them.

1. In Acts 26:26 (part 2 of Luke’s work), the apostle Paul will say of these marvelous events, “This has not been done in a corner.” Eyewitness testimony is a constant theme.

2. Skeptics have admitted: “The foundation of the critical approach to the gospels is the recognition that much of the information in the gospels is based on hearsay.” (The Jesus Seminar’s *Acts of Jesus*, p. 4).
3. Don’t believe everything you are told about the Bible!
4. Who was in a better position to state the author’s intentions – the author himself or his modern detractors?
5. Who was in a better position to know what really happened – a first-century doctor or a 21st century skeptic?
6. Who has a higher ethical code – a Christian who wants to tell us exactly what happened or a revisionist historian with an anti-supernatural agenda?
7. If someone asserts that Luke’s record is flawed, who then has the burden of proof?

B. One of the neatest things about the first two chapters of Luke is that we can probably identify Luke’s first eyewitness:

1. Mary was “greatly troubled” at the angel’s statement (1:29);
2. Mary “arose and went with haste” to visit her relative Elizabeth (1:41);
3. Mary “stayed with her about three months” (1:56) – presumably long enough to witness the birth of John, since this was the 6th month (cf. 1:26);
4. Mary “wrapped [the baby Jesus] in cloths, and laid him in a manger...” (2:7);
5. Mary “treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart” (2:19);
6. Simeon blessed Jesus in the Temple and warned Mary, “A sword will pierce even your own soul” (2:34-35);
7. Jesus’ parents “used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover” (2:41) – an incidental detail;
8. “His parents were unaware” of his staying behind in the city at age 12 (2:43);
9. When they finally found him, “his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us this way?’” (2:48);
10. After returning to Nazareth, “his mother treasured all these things in her heart” (2:51).
11. Incidentally, Mary is still alive when the church begins and would no doubt have been called upon to leave a record of her remembrances (cf. Acts 1:14). The first two chapters of Luke have her fingerprints all over them!

C. In future classes, we’re going to read about some remarkable episodes in the life of our Savior.

1. You have very good reasons for confidence that this record is historically accurate.
2. This is not the product of an overheated imagination. In the words of the apostle Paul, these are “words of sober truth” (Acts 26:25).
3. As we embark on an exciting journey of discovery together, we challenge you to “consider the source.” In this case, it’s one you can trust!

Extra Notes for Teachers:

- Each paragraph in Luke builds some aspect of faith. The focus here is on **conviction**. Christianity is a system based on evidence, and evidence is what produces conviction.

- The Christian faith is based on two broad lines of evidence:
 - The World: God's Book of Nature (Ps. 19:1-6)
 - The Word: God's Book of Scripture (Ps. 19:7-14)
- According to 2 Peter 1:16-21, the evidence in the revealed Word (the Bible) can be broken down into at least two categories:
 - Eyewitness testimony of supernatural interventions in history (especially regarding Jesus)
 - Predictive prophecies that are now fulfilled
- In teaching this unit, these are some sample questions you can use to generate thought and discussion:
 - If you were a first-century Christian writing a book about Jesus, how would you begin?
 - How do we know these things really happened?
 - How do fairy tales usually begin?
 - Why is it significant that Mary should be an apparent eyewitness?
 - Eyewitnesses usually reveal some of their own personal perspectives and *gut reactions*. Do we see this on Mary's part?
- Here are some other sections of Luke that build conviction:
 - **5:17-26.** Jesus does something that is visible and tangible to prove His ability to do what cannot be tested empirically.
 - **16:19-31.** Acceptance of the evidence requires a certain mindset.
 - **24:1-53.** He is risen! Eyewitnesses see Him.

The Temptation of Jesus

Lesson 3

Read Luke 4:1-13.

It was an epic struggle between Jesus and the devil. This confrontation may seem obscure to modern readers, but it is remarkably relevant to the lives we live today.

I. A lesson on *identifying sin*

A. What was so wrong with Satan's idea? Is turning stones into bread such a big deal?

1. First, it should be noted that Jesus never performed a miracle for either sensational or self-serving reasons.
2. Miracles were pictures of the kingdom and credentials of Jesus' power. There is always a "kingdom purpose" behind every miracle.
3. Miracles were never intended to undermine simple trust in God's day-to-day provisions.

B. The three tests offer shortcuts to something Jesus wanted badly:

1. Food without work.
2. A crown without a cross.
3. Glory without trust.

C. All three proposals are detours, bypassing trust in God to provide basic needs (food), power (kingdom), or glory (angelic protection).

1. All three propositions necessitate a violation of trust.
2. They offer an alternative to patiently waiting on God to provide in His own time and in His own way.
3. *Sin, at its root, is a violation of trust in God and His benevolent provision.*

II. A lesson on *overcoming sin*

A. At issue in two of three temptations is Jesus' divine Sonship ("If you are the Son of God...")

1. Jesus refused to take the bait and play the devil's game by the devil's rules on the devil's playing field.
2. Our Lord knew who He was, and He did not need to prove it to Himself or Satan.
3. Consequently, He did not utilize a superhuman arsenal to ward off Satan's ploys.

B. Jesus won the victory over temptation on the *human* level, just like we must do. There were two keys to victory.

1. Sheer determination. Jesus never sinned because He did not want to sin!
2. Appeal to the Word of God. Every temptation is thwarted with a citation from Scripture.

C. We can win the victory, too! Sometimes, temptation may seem insurmountable, but we can overcome, the same way Jesus did. Cf. I Cor. 10:13.

III. A lesson on *accurately handling* the word of truth (cf. II Tim. 2:15)

A. Jesus is not the only one who cites Scripture in this encounter. Satan diabolically misapplies Psalm 91:11-12 in an effort to get Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple.

1. Ps. 91 is a psalm about trust – cf. Ps. 91:2, 13, etc.
2. Satan tries to get Jesus to force God’s hand and violate the very trust spoken about in the psalm!

B. Satan’s misuses the Scripture three ways:

1. He takes a *figurative* passage *literally*
2. He takes a *complete* passage *partially* (entirely out of context)
3. He takes a *conditional* promise (e.g., faith is required) *unconditionally*. People still misuse and misapply the Bible in the same ways. Beware!

C. Jesus, on the other hand, uses the Bible as a “lamp” to His feet and a “light” to His path (cf. Ps. 119:105).

1. His use of the Bible shows a profound respect for its authority and practical application.
 2. Also, every citation comes from Deuteronomy – 6:13; 6:16; and 8:3.
 3. Notice especially Deuteronomy 8
 - a. God had tested the Israelites in the wilderness, to see if they would keep His commandments (8:2).
 - b. He preserved their clothing and protected their health (8:4).
 - c. He also fed them with manna from above, so that they might learn how to depend totally on Him (8:3). Manna was not “bread alone,” gained apart from the Father’s care. It was intended to teach *trust* – the very kind Satan did not want Jesus to exercise!
 4. The Israelites in the OT did not always practice this total dependence on God because they were short on faith. Not so with Jesus.
 5. The victory He won shows that God’s Word is powerful, effective, and relevant. We need the same Word to win the victory today.
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Extra Notes for Teachers:

<u>Israel</u>	<u>Jesus</u>
• Corporate “Son” (Hosea 11:1)	Beloved Son (Matt. 2:15)
• Out of Egypt	Out of Egypt
• “Baptized” in cloud and sea	Baptized in the Jordan by John
• 40 years of wilderness deprivation	40 days of wilderness deprivation
• Testing in the wilderness	Testing in the wilderness
• Failure	Victory
• DEUTERONOMY	DEUTERONOMY

A Fisherman and a Leper

Lesson 4

This faith-building lesson covers two episodes in the 5th chapter of Luke. In each paragraph, we will examine one of two key elements of trust, and why Jesus is worthy of our trust.

I. Building the faith to catch men – Luke 5:1-11

A. Background and setting

1. Using the Lake of Gennesaret as a natural amplifier, the Lord teaches the eager multitude along the shore from a fishing boat.
2. When he finishes the morning lesson, he says to Simon Peter, “Put out into the deep water for a catch.”
3. Peter was reluctant: “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing...”
4. He decided nevertheless to humor Jesus: “...but at your bidding I will let down the nets.”

B. What ensued is nothing short of extraordinary

1. The text speaks of “a great quantity of fish,” nets that “began to break,” and two boats that “began to sink.”
2. Peter was humbled, and a profound sense of unworthiness overwhelmed him. He fell prostrate and pleaded, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”
3. This is reminiscent of Isaiah – cf. Isaiah 6:5

C. Jesus’ miracles always had a *kingdom* purpose. In this case, it was to prepare Peter for his life’s work.

1. There are three stages to Peter’s development in the Gospels:
 - a. Following the teaching of Jesus as a disciple – cf. Jn. 1:40-42
 - b. Leaving the fishing business for a higher calling – cf. Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 8:1-3
 - c. Becoming one of the twelve apostles – cf. Lk. 6:12-16
2. It is to prepare Peter to go to the 2nd stage, and, soon thereafter, to the 3rd, that Jesus performs this miracle. With a family to feed, would this personable and outspoken disciple have the faith to leave his established career?
3. The miracle was, in essence, a clear message: “Don’t ever doubt Me! I can put fish in your nets better than you ever dreamed!”

D. Did the miracle produce the desired effect?

1. Jesus challenged his pupil: “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”
2. The result: “When they had brought their boats to land, they left *everything* and followed him.” (emph. mine, MW)

II. A Leper’s faith – Luke 5:12-13

A. The author of this Gospel, ever mindful of medical diagnosis (cf. Col. 4:14), describes a man who was “full of leprosy.”

1. No doubt hearing of Jesus' fame, he had searched Jesus out – cf. 5:15
2. When he saw Him, he said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

B. Biblical faith involves three subcomponents:

1. **Conviction** of mind
2. **Trust** of heart
3. **Surrender** of will

C. The heart of faith is the second component, trust. In order for trust to be well-placed, there must be some rational basis. Is the Lord trustworthy?

1. In the case of Jesus and His promises, this revolves around two issues:
 - a. Is He **able** to help us?
 - b. Is He **willing** to help us?
2. Many people, including Peter (in the preceding paragraph), struggle with the Lord's **ability** – cf. Rom. 4:21; Mk. 9:22-23. The leper did not have any doubts about it: “You *can* make me clean.”
3. His problem rested on the Savior's **willingness**: “If you are willing...”
4. Many people have the same problem. Perhaps they lack the confidence that, because of long indulgence in sin, Jesus would actually be **willing** to grant full and complete pardon to them.
5. Such a person might say to himself, “I know He could forgive someone and take him to heaven, but given my own unworthiness, I'm not sure He *would* ever do it for *me*.”
6. We must remind ourselves that lepers in first-century Jewish society were reminded that they were outcasts every day. They were “unclean,” and everyone saw them that way.

D. This little episode is not simply a matter of historical biography. It is written for us!

1. What did Jesus do for this leper? He did the unthinkable: “He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately the leprosy left him.”
2. And what is Jesus willing to do today for each person, plagued not with the disease of the skin but with the heart disease of the soul?
3. Imagine for just a moment the warmth of the Savior's hand reaching out to YOU, as He gently says, “I am willing. Be cleansed.”
4. If we are able to take this lesson to heart, our faith can skyrocket!

Extra Notes for Teachers:

- If you are inclined, you might impress the connection between leprosy (or other skin conditions) and sin in the Bible – cf. Isaiah 1:6; Lev. 14; etc.
- Building on the idea that trusting faith ultimately surrenders to specific conditions, one might allude to the story of Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5:1-14).

A Centurion's Rare Faith

Lesson 5

Read Luke 7:1-10.

Often, it seems, Jesus was amazed at people's lack of faith. When the Lord came back to his hometown of Nazareth, "he wondered at their unbelief" (Mk. 6:6).

On another occasion, Peter, after mustering his confidence to defy the laws of gravity and walk toward his master on the water's surface, became intimidated and began to sink in the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee. Jesus issued a gentle, but firm, rebuke to his frightened disciple: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt. 14:31). When our convictions waver, or our confidence wanes, would he assess our faith any differently?

It is against this backdrop of widespread deficiencies of faith that the story is told of Jesus marveling at how "great" a man's faith was.

At Capernaum, a certain centurion had a beloved slave who was ill and at the point of death. The centurion sent a delegation of Jewish elders appealing to Jesus for the boy's life. Yet, when Jesus drew near the house, the man sent friends, saying, "Lord, do not trouble yourself further, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof; but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it" (Lk. 7:6-8).

At this point, a stunned Jesus reacted, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Lk. 7:9). What exactly was it that made this man's faith so "great"?

I. A Question of Worthiness

A. Although the Lord would be "despised and forsaken of men" (Isa. 53:3), the centurion, instead, fully recognized the greatness of Jesus.

B. In turn, he also realized his own unworthiness to entertain Jesus under his own roof.

1. In the estimation of the Jewish elders, the centurion was "worthy" of this miracle.
2. In his own eyes, the man was profoundly "unworthy."
3. Such an assessment does not come without a depth of conviction that surpasses the shallow thinking of many people.
4. Do you have a healthy respect for Jesus' greatness, in comparison with your own unworthiness?

II. A Question of Authority

A. The centurion was "under authority" of his superiors in the Roman army, and he had soldiers "under" him.

1. When he issued a simple command, the order was as good as done.
2. Since Jesus had greater authority, should not the same principle apply?

B. If the Lord would just “say the word,” the slave would be healed instantly.

1. What trust!
2. The centurion had absolute confidence in the Lord’s power to heal.
3. Jesus’ personal presence was not needed – just his word!
4. It is significant that this man’s faith was counted as “great” because he recognized the absolute authority of Jesus’ word.

No wonder the Lord marveled, and proceeded to heal the man’s slave. Unwavering faith of this kind must certainly be rewarded. The fact that the centurion was a Gentile made his faith all the more remarkable.

How does the story end? “When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health” (Lk. 7:10).

Extra Notes for Teachers:

- “Faith” is not something that is either there, in full measure, or completely absent. Strong faith usually develops gradually over time. Jesus constantly upbraids his disciples for being short on faith. His intent was to *strengthen* their faith.
- Faith can be “great” (Lk. 7:9), it can be “little” (Mt. 8:26), it can “increase” (Lk. 17:5), it can cause people to “turn” (Acts 11:21), and it may or may not “save” (James 2:14).
- Faith can also regress. Christians are warned, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12).
- How does strong faith come about? The word of God produces faith (Rom. 10:17). It contains...
 - Evidence to produce *conviction* (John 20:30-31)
 - Unwavering promises of Christ which build *trust* (Lk. 5:1-13)
 - Commands that call for *surrender* (Lk. 6:46)
- The centurion was a strong believer because he had *heard about* Jesus, and he had the disposition of mind to believe what he had heard.

Why Some Believe and Others Don't

Lesson 6

Luke 7:18-35

I. "Are You the Expected One...?" 7:18-23

A. John the Baptist was in prison and would be executed – 3:19-20

1. He had to rely on reports from others about how things were progressing (7:18)
2. He sent two messengers to Jesus (7:19).

B. John's question: "Are you the expected One, or do we look for someone else?" (7:20)

1. It is likely that developments hadn't played out the way John had expected.
2. Uncertainty about his own fate may have also contributed to his impatience and caused lingering doubts. John, after all, already knew very well who Jesus was (cf. John 1:29).
3. There was preaching and healing, but where was the promised kingdom?
4. In the presence of John's disciples, Jesus performs some extraordinary miracles
5. He then ties what He is accomplishing to O.T. prophecy about the coming Messiah (Lk. 7:21-23; cf. Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1)

II. In Defense of John – 7:24-30

A. "What did you go out into the wilderness to see?" 7:24-26 (asked 3 times)

1. "A reed shaken by the wind?" Was John spineless? Lk. 3:7
2. "A man dressed in soft clothing?" Did John wear a tuxedo? Mt. 3:4
3. "A prophet?" "Yes... more than a prophet!"

B. The greatness of John – 7:27-28

1. Many disciples of Jesus were former disciples of John.
2. Jesus says John fulfills O.T. prophecy, as the "messenger" sent on ahead to "prepare" the way of the Messiah – Malachi 3:1
3. "Among those born of women there is no one greater than John"
4. "Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." I.e., he will see in retrospect the kingdom and enjoy blessings that John could only prophesy about.

C. The crowd's reaction – 7:29-30

1. Humble people and despised tax collectors "**acknowledged God's justice**" when they heard this. This is a key word: they "*vindicated*" or "*justified*" God and His plan.
2. Why? They had been "baptized with the baptism of John."
3. The "Pharisees and lawyers," on the other hand, had "**rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.**"
4. This statement validates not only the greatness of John (in God's estimation) but also the necessity of his contemporaries *obeying* his teaching – cf. Mark 1:4-5.
5. John was, after all, *God's* prophet with *God's* message. (Luke 20:1-8 will be explored in a future lesson).

III. "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation...?" 7:31-35

- A. Jesus searches for an appropriate analogy from everyday life: "They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to one another..."
1. One group of children is calling out to another group to join in the game.
 2. The invited group does not want to play, whether the game is joyous or sad ("wedding songs" or "funeral songs," *New Living Translation*)
 3. No matter what game is proposed, they are not going to participate!
- B. The point
1. Some of Jesus' contemporaries (esp. the self-appointed elite) weren't going to comply with God's message, no matter who the messenger was.
 2. They accused John of being *antisocial* and Jesus of being *too social*.
 3. Personality and style (i.e., the outward packaging) made no difference. Some people are just not going to listen.
- C. "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" – 7:35.
1. The word "justified" is a form of the same word found in 7:29 ("all the people and the tax collectors... *justified* God").
 2. In contrast to the spoiled brats who won't play the game, no matter what (v. 32), the children here are going to justify God and His wisdom.
 3. No matter who rejects Jesus and the will of God, there is a group of people who will vindicate the rightness of everything He teaches us.

Teachers' Notes

Goal of this lesson:

- Introduce the concept of baptism and its necessity, though not necessarily developing the full implications
- Explore the role of each person's condition of heart as a factor in conversion
- Press the issue with each person, to examine whether he has what it takes to be a true disciple
- Begin making the connection between faith and total surrender

Possible leading questions, to get people talking:

- When it comes to the Bible, why do some people "get it" and others don't?
- Who was John the Baptist, and what role did he have?
- If a Jew in John's audience decided *not* to comply with John's baptism, what was his spiritual condition?
- Could the greatest Teacher who ever lived convert everybody? Why not?

He Who Has Ears to Hear...

Lesson 7

Read Luke 8:4-15

Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” In this lesson we examine the ways different people respond to the gospel message and will challenge you to do some self-examination.

I. General observations about this parable

- A. This parable is explained. Verses 4-8 contain the parable, and verses 9-15 contain the explanation.
- B. This is, in many respects, the most fundamental of all the parables.
 1. In Mark’s parallel account, Jesus says, “Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all parables?” (Mk. 4:13)
 2. Part of the reason for its foundational importance is that it deals with hearing the Word and the ways that people respond to all the parables (and, indeed, all of God’s Word).
 3. Jesus explains that not all will come to know the “mysteries of the kingdom” – only those to whom it has been granted.
 4. The Bible has an amazing ability to yield its meaning to those who are hungry for it and to hide its meaning from those who are not. Parables especially are designed to *reveal* and *conceal* at the same time.
- C. The parable uses a farming analogy to analyze the harvest-bearing potential of God’s truth.
 1. The seed (= the Word) is constant (v. 11). The variable is the soil type.
 2. There are 4 soils depicted:
 - a. The wayside (“those beside the road”) = the hard heart
 - b. Rocky ground = the shallow heart
 - c. Thorny ground = the divided heart
 - d. The good ground = the good heart (responsive and fruit-bearing)
 3. Notice that each of the successive soil types represents an advance over the previous one.
 - a. I.e., the rocky ground represents those who hear the Word and receive it with joy. People who are like wayside soil don’t even give the Word a chance to germinate.
 - b. The thorny ground heart produces a plant that lasts for the long haul, unlike the rocky ground, which produces a temporary sprout.
 - c. The good ground is productive of a desirable harvest, unlike the thorns.
 4. People are not predisposed by force to fall under one of the four categories against their will.
 - a. It is entirely possible that a person whose heart is hardened against the truth at one point in life will yield later on, after his heart is softened.
 - b. In fact, one purpose of this parable is to challenge us to be like the good ground.
 - c. Notice that Jesus, as He said these things, would call out, “He who has ears

to hear, let him hear” (v. 8). He evidently repeated this saying to emphasize the point!

II. The challenge to you

- A. The *wayside* (vv. 5, 12) – why don’t some people give the Word a chance?
 - 1. Prejudice
 - 2. Preconceived notions
 - 3. Blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4)
 - 4. Can that happen to you?
- B. The *rocky soil* (vv. 6, 13) – why don’t some people stay with it?
 - 1. They lack depth of commitment
 - 2. They haven’t counted the cost
 - 3. They allow temptation to pull them away
 - 4. They fall away
- C. The *thorny soil* (vv. 7, 14) – why don’t some people become productive?
 - 1. They are choked with worries
 - 2. They are choked with money
 - 3. They are choked by pleasure
 - 4. What are some of the ways this happens today?
- D. The *good ground* (vv. 8, 15) – why aren’t all people like this?
 - 1. They really listen to the Word
 - 2. They have a good and honest heart
 - 3. They have staying power
 - 4. They bear fruit, no matter what

Final question: which of these soil types represents *you* right now?

Turning Points

Luke 9:18-36

The ministry of Jesus hinges on several key points in Luke 9. The transfiguration is the “high point” of the Savior’s earthly ministry, after which the days approach “for His ascension,” when He determined “to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).

In this lesson, we look at 3 pivotal episodes. Each one ends with a startling revelation. Moreover, the first and third paragraphs begin with Jesus praying and end with the disciples keeping a huge secret.

I. Following Jesus as the Christ – Luke 9:18-22

- A. The teaser question: “Who do the people say that I am?”
 - 1. Was Jesus really interested in popular opinion, or was the question designed to get them thinking and skillfully introduce the follow-up question?
 - 2. Answers given:
 - a. John the Baptist, who was recently put to death
 - b. Elijah, who was prophesied to come, ushering in the Christ (cf. Mal. 4:5-6)
 - c. One of the prophets of old resurrected

- B. The follow-up question: “But who do you say that I am?”
 - 1. Peter spoke up, as he often does
 - 2. Peter’s answer: “The Christ of God”
 - 3. What it means: that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Old Testament prophecy, the Savior-King who would come into the world

- C. Silence commanded: “But He warned and instructed them not to tell this to anyone”
 - 1. The time was not yet right for the truth of Jesus’ identity to be revealed to the world at large.
 - 2. **Amazing revelation #1** – In fact, a confrontation was coming, and it would lead to Jesus’ death and resurrection.
 - 3. Jesus predicts His future suffering and glory, but, as is obvious from the paragraphs that follow, the disciples did not completely understand the full import of it.

II. Following Jesus to the cross – Luke 9:23-27

- A. Not only must the disciples come to terms with Jesus’ impending death (v. 22), but they must follow Him – v. 23.

- B. Discipleship is a radical choice that each person must make – vv. 23-26.
 - 1. Crucifixion was a shameful, horrifying means of execution, reserved for slaves,

lower class scum, and notorious criminals. Roman citizens were spared this horror.

2. What Jesus is calling for is an absolute, total commitment in the strongest possible language.

3. If we want to serve Jesus, we must deny self, take up the cross, and follow Him “daily.”

C. **Amazing revelation #2** – the kingdom of God would come during the lifetime of some of Jesus’ audience – v. 27.

III. Following Jesus beyond the grave – Luke 9:28-36

A. A week later, Jesus takes Peter, John and James to a mountain to pray. During this time alone with God, there is a “transfiguration.”

1. Visual effects

a. Jesus’ appearance is transfigured; i.e., He takes on a radiant glory – perhaps a foretaste of the glory that He now has (Phil. 3:20-21).

b. Two men, Moses and Elijah, also “appear in glory”

c. A cloud overshadows them

2. Auditory effects

a. Moses and Elijah speak to Jesus

b. A voice comes out of the cloud

B. The significance of Moses and Elijah

1. Moses was the great Lawgiver at the beginning of Israel’s national existence, and Elijah was the foremost in a long line of prophets toward the end of Israel’s history.

2. Both had unusual departures from this life:

a. After he saw the land of promise from Mt. Nebo and the top of Pisgah, Moses died and the LORD buried him (Deut. 34:1-6).

b. Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven, with chariots and horses of fire (II Kings 2:11-12).

3. Interestingly enough, they talk with Jesus about His own departure (lit.

“exodus”) – Luke 9:31. This fits well with the theme of all 3 episodes in this section – death and resurrection, followed by glory.

4. Perhaps they were sent to comfort Him in ways that no mere mortal could have done.

5. In many respects, Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets (i.e., two of three divisions of the Old Testament).

6. After Peter’s brilliant idea (“three tabernacles”), the two Old Testament heroes disappear, and the Voice says, “This is My Son, My Chosen One: listen to Him!” (**amazing revelation #3**).

7. Jesus Christ is not only greater than Moses and Elijah, but His message, the New Testament, supercedes the Old Testament – cf. Heb. 1:1-2; John 1:17

Thought question: **What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ?**

Faith and the Holy Spirit

Luke 12:1-12

Luke chapter 12 is a goldmine of preaching. The text says, “so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling on one another” (12:1), and there is a fascinating exchange between Jesus the Preacher and His audience.

In fact, He switches back and forth between His *inner circle* of disciples and the *crowd*. Who does Jesus address in v. 1... v. 13 ... v. 22 ... v. 41 ... v. 54?

- “He began to say to his disciples first of all” – v. 1
- “Someone in the crowd...” – v. 13
- “And he said to his disciples” – v. 22
- “Peter said, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?’” – v. 41
- “He also said to the crowds...” – v. 54

A proper interpretation of each paragraph depends on the context of each, including which group is targeted. The first paragraph is specifically addressed “to his disciples first of all” (v. 1), whom He affectionately refers to as “my friends” (v. 4).

I. No Secrets – 12:1-3

A. First, Jesus warns His closest disciples of “the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

1. I.e., with the Pharisees, you don’t always see behind the masks they wear.
2. There was a lot of pretentiousness.

B. It would be different with the apostles.

1. Private discussions between Jesus and the Twelve would be made a matter of public record in the pages of the gospel.
2. This did not always put the disciples in the best light, because at times they were slow learners.
3. The disciples, in turn, must have the fortitude to stand up, as it were, on *housetops*, and go public with their faith.
4. A great proclamation awaited them, and they would be the agents to carry it out.

II. Courage Needed – 12:4-9

A. Preaching the gospel would be a life-threatening enterprise, but they must press on with absolute dependence on God. Two points are made:

1. God must be feared more than men – vv. 4-5.
2. God will not forget them when they stand firm for His cause – vv. 6-7.

B. At this point, Jesus issues a challenge – vv. 8-9.

1. What does it mean, in this context, to confess Jesus before men?

2. In view of the judgment to come, there is ample reason to go public with one's faith, unashamedly and boldly.

III. The Holy Spirit and the Apostolic Message – 12:10-12

A. Much is made of the statement concerning blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (v.

10). What does this mean, in context?

1. The whole passage pivots on the distinction between the privilege they now enjoyed as apprentices of the Master Teacher and the turbulent times ahead when they would take this message to the world.
2. The comforts of the moment would soon end!
3. The Lord would leave the apostles, the Holy Spirit would empower them and they would begin the great work for which Jesus was preparing them – cf. 24:46-49.

B. The crowds would have a second chance to repent.

1. If they rejected Jesus while in the flesh, they still had the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would operate through the apostles and their preaching.
2. If people rejected the Spirit's message, then there would be nothing left to save them from their sins!
3. Blasphemy against Jesus the Son would be forgiven, but the Holy Spirit's message through the apostles would be the world's last hope. Without it, no forgiveness is possible.

C. The last two verses of this paragraph confirm the interpretation – vv. 11-12.

1. The Holy Spirit would work through the apostles.
2. This would provide both the "how" and the "what" of their message – both method and content. Cf. Luke 21:14-16.
3. The benefit for the apostles is that their words would be supernaturally provided, and they would not have to worry about what to say in their defense.
4. The benefit to all posterity (including us!) is that we have an apostolic message, with the full authority of Jesus Christ and the complete guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Possible Discussion Items:

- Can we differentiate between allegiance to Jesus and adherence to His Word?
I John 1:2-3; 2:3
- Our view of the "inspiration" of the New Testament is based on the promises of Jesus to the apostles, and the fulfillment of those promises. How does Luke 12 help us with this issue?
- Jesus required these disciples to be courageous in proclaiming the faith. Should He expect anything less of us?

Seeing is Believing

John 9

The seven “I am” statements in the Gospel of John go well with episodes that we read about. In 8:12, Jesus says, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*” Then in chapter 9, he gives a man born blind the ability to see. **Read 9:1-7.**

The real lesson, however, is on *spiritual sight* and *spiritual blindness*. There are three groups of people who had trouble “seeing” the full implications of the miracle.

I. The Neighbors : Skeptics – 9:8-12

- a. They could not seem to come to terms with this.
 - i. Could it really be him? Or is he a look-alike?
 - ii. Then how were your eyes opened?
 - iii. Where is the one who did this?
- b. Notice that they take the man to the Pharisees (v. 13). That wouldn’t help much!
- c. Many people today are like the neighbors.
 - i. Curious but skeptical.
 - ii. Then, if they search of answers, they go to all the wrong places.
 - iii. What separates a curiosity seeker from one who finds the truth about Jesus?

II. The Pharisees: Religiously Blind

- a. Their minds were made up. So they rejected Jesus, His words, and His claims in the face of irrefutable evidence.
- b. Their inquisition was an attack rather than an honest inquiry.
 - i. Interrogation #1 – **9:13-17**
 1. Perhaps the making of mud with such simple ingredients as dirt and saliva was construed as kneading, one of 39 classes of “work” forbidden on the Sabbath in the Mishna.
 2. The Babylonian Talmud has a tractate which discusses how far it is permissible to anoint sore eyes on the Sabbath.
 3. Their near-sightedness over Pharisaic tradition did not enable them to see the obvious!
 - ii. Investigation of the parents (see below, 9:18-23)
 - iii. Interrogation #2 – **9:24-34**
 1. “Give glory to God” – cf. Joshua’s statement to Achan (Josh. 7:19). I.e., “own up and tell the truth!”
 2. The man may not have been able to speak eloquently on their level, but he knew one thing, and they could not refute it.

3. The Pharisees' angry response suggests they realized they were getting the worst of the argument, so they get rid of the man.
- c. What do these Pharisees have in common with those who are religiously blind today?

III. The Parents: Cowards – 9:18-23

- a. They limited their testimony so as not to get into trouble with the authorities.
- b. The motive was fear. They did not want to be expelled from the synagogue. Cf. John 12:42-43.
- c. Do you know people like these parents? So far as we know, did the parents ever come to terms with Jesus?

IV. The Blind Man: a Lonely Believer – 9:35-41

- a. Would you know Jesus if you “saw” Him? This is evidently the first time the man laid his eyes on Jesus.
- b. Why did this man become a believer? Because he “saw” the truth of Jesus. It was more than physical sight – cf. vv. 31-33.
- c. Notice how this contrasts with the blindness of the Pharisees – vv. 39-41.

It has been said that the Gospel of John contains a representative sample of all types of people in how they respond to Jesus. This is part of the power of the 4th Gospel.

In a manner of speaking, *you* are in this story. Who best represents YOU?

- The skeptical neighbors, full of idle curiosity?
- The Pharisees, deeply religious but blind to the truth?
- The parents, afraid to confront the truth for fear of the consequences? Or...
- The blind man who now saw... and believed?

Seeing is believing!

Counting the Cost

What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” (*The Cost of Discipleship*). In this lesson, we will look at 3 paragraphs in the Gospel of Luke that spell out the cost.

I. The commitment of being a Christian – Luke 14:25-33

- A. In what sense are we to “hate” family members? v. 26
 - 1. Jesus is using hyperbole (overstatement) to get people’s attention.
 - 2. In truth, our love for the Lord should burn with such intensity that familial love can never compare (cf. Luke 11:27-28).
 - 3. What will we do if we truly love God? I John 5:3; John 14:15
- B. What does it mean to *bear one’s own cross*? v. 27
 - 1. In the first-century Roman world, crucifixion was a painful, shameful means of execution.
 - 2. Jesus could not have spelled out the commitment of discipleship in language any stronger!
- C. Counting the cost – vv. 28-32
 - 1. A builder constructing a tower must do some calculations.
 - 2. A king facing a military skirmish also must deliberate the cost of battle.
 - 3. Application: a disciple of Christ must “renounce all that he has” (v. 33). What does this mean in practical terms?

II. The Lordship of Christ – Luke 6:46-49

- A. If we “call” Jesus Lord, there is an implied surrender to His will.
 - 1. Lordship on His part means absolute submission for the true disciple.
 - 2. To call Him Lord and fail to do what He says is hypocrisy.
- B. The little story about the man who “dug deep” has special meaning to those who live in coastal areas.
 - 1. On the Pacific coast, mudslides and earthquakes have a way of ruining property value.
 - 2. The same goes for hurricanes on the outer banks of North Carolina.
 - 3. In California especially, building codes give great attention to solid foundations.
- C. The same is true of the gospel.
 - 1. We will be unprepared for spiritual torrents if we do not ground our faith in the exact requirements of the God’s Word.
 - 2. If we really trust Jesus, we will do precisely what He tells us to do.

III. Obedient Slaves – Luke 17:5-10

- A. In response to the apostles' demand, "Increase our faith," Jesus talks about having faith "like a mustard seed" (v. 6).
1. The genetic code built into a tiny mustard seed has great potential.
 2. Likewise, faith makes "impossible things" possible!
 3. All this is predicated on an absolute, unwavering trust.
- B. The slave illustration (vv. 7-10).
1. This is a difficult analogy for modern people who enjoy all the protections and rights of labor laws. A slave was the walking, talking property of someone else.
 2. When he did what was expected, there were no congratulations or promotions.
 3. Even though the institution of slavery might cause us to shudder, the application of willing service to a generous, heavenly Master is not hard to see.
- C. The proper balance between *God's part* and *our part* in salvation.
1. Obeying the Lord does not mean we are inherently "worthy."
 - a. In fact, salvation is a matter of God's grace and mercy (cf. Eph. 2:8-10).
 - b. Nothing we "do" will ever make us "worthy" of heaven's blessings.
 2. On the other hand, God's mercy does not exclude the fact that we have a "duty."
 - a. This includes "all things which are commanded you."
 - b. Can we willfully disregard any of the Lord's command's? Not if we have "counted the cost"!
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Notes to Teachers:

Many people in our society have trouble coming to terms with the whole idea of obedience.

- Postmodernists want to experience God on their terms, not His.
- Many professed Christians subscribe to a "faith only" theology that undermines an absolute submission to God's plan.

Remember that Biblical faith involves 3 sub-components:

- Conviction (of mind)
- Trust (of heart)
- Submission (of will)

This lesson emphasizes the *absolute nature* of that submission.

Will Few Be Saved?

Luke 13:22-30

What if odds-makers got into the business of predicting people's eternal destinies? This question could be worded another way: "Will few be *lost*?" or "Will *many* be saved?" Why do you suppose the questioner framed his question the way he did? In this area, there is probably a vast difference between perception and reality. If you were to take a straw poll to determine where people plan on spending eternity, what would the results look like?

I. What Jesus does *not* say

- A. He doesn't give a statistical answer
- B. Based on past history, the vast majority seem to find a way to get on the losing end
 - 1. How many were saved in the Great Flood? Eight
 - 2. How many were saved from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Three
 - 3. Out of 603,550 Israelite fighting men over the age of 20, how many from that generation entered into the Promised Land? Two
- C. Definition of "insanity": doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results! Human beings have a long track record of spiritual insanity.

II. What Jesus does say

- A. Instead of throwing out percentages or raw numbers, what does Jesus do? He issues a challenge: "*Strive to enter through the narrow door*" (24).
 - 1. He protects us from information we cannot handle.
 - 2. He provides us with information that is totally useful.
- B. He then proceeds to give us glimpses of what will happen on Judgment Day (5 things).
 - 1. "Many" will be lost – 24
 - 2. False expectations will be shattered – 25
 - 3. People who thought they knew the Lord will be unrecognized – 26-27
 - 4. Finally, those same people will be banished – 27-28
 - 5. Common expectations will be totally overturned – 29-30

III. What can we do about it?

- A. Make sure you are on the right path – 2 Peter 1:10-11; Matt. 7:21-27
- B. Help others find the way – I Cor. 9:19, 22
- C. Make it a top priority
- D. Heaven will be a great place for two reasons:
 - 1. Who we get to spend it with – 28
 - 2. What we will do – 29
- E. Don't miss it for the world!