

The
New
Testament
in a Year

Week 3

Luke 11-15

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General Questions for Reflection

- What do I learn in these chapters about who God is?
- What are Jesus' main concerns?
- How do these chapters encourage me?
- How do they challenge me?
- What questions do they raise for me?
- What do I learn here about faith? About prayer? About being a Christian?

Monday

Luke 11

Jesus is journeying towards Jerusalem. He is single-mindedly focused on his goal, but along the way he demonstrates God's power in words and deeds.

Seeking God's rule means praying persistently and faithfully. Prayer isn't giving God our wish list, it's being open and available to the Holy Spirit. It also expresses our trust in God. What do you need to be taught about prayer?

Jesus demonstrated that the Kingdom was near by casting out demons. Demons signified the forces of chaos that tried to wreck God's work. Jesus defeats them with wholeness and love. But, Jesus says, these demons are tricky. Don't let your guard down! (vv. 24-25) What "demons" need casting out today?

Everyone wanted Jesus to give them a sign, to prove he was for real. But that's a way of trying to control God. You don't need a sign, Jesus said, you need repentance, faith and openness to God. Do you find it hard to trust God?

If your first concern is your relationship with God, then your outward actions will reflect God's will, Jesus said.

Luke places Jesus in a long line of prophets who were persecuted for obeying God.

Tuesday

Luke 12

Faithfulness is a matter of getting the "inside" and the "outside" straight. The Pharisees obsessed about outward appearances but covered up their own hypocrisy. Don't be afraid of getting your rituals wrong, Jesus said, be afraid of losing your soul. There's a lot of fear around today. Do you think people are afraid of the wrong things?

The expression "blaspheming the Holy Spirit" in v. 10 means rejecting the living presence of God in the church and in our lives. Luke sees the Spirit as the very life force of the Christian community. Refusing the Spirit is like committing spiritual suicide. It's the worst thing we can do.

Jesus describes how destructive greed can be. It blinds us to what is really essential.

Many of Jesus' teachings focus on the need to be ready. We never know when God will break into our lives and if we're unprepared, we'll be caught by surprise. Being prepared means not dissipating all of our energy worrying about material things.

Jesus reminds us that his presence can really turn our lives upside down and actually create conflict because of the choices he demands that we make.

Wednesday

Luke 13

This is Jesus' answer to those who think that following him will mean a trouble-free life. If you think Jesus is your ticket to happiness and prosperity, you'll be disappointed. What matters is that your life bears Christ-like fruit.

Much of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees was over how to interpret the laws in Scripture. The Pharisees put keeping the Sabbath regulations ahead of works of justice and mercy. They had forgotten that God gave the Sabbath to bless us.

Jesus' parables remind us that God's kingdom is mysterious. From insignificant beginnings it grows and spreads until it pervades all of life.

In verses 22-30, Jesus addresses the curiosity people have always had about who will be saved, who's "in" and who's "out". (Amazing how much time we still spend on that question.) Rather than worrying about such questions, pay attention to your own faithfulness, Jesus said. Salvation is up to God, and you can bet it will be full of surprises.

Jesus was a political as well as a religious figure. His presence was a threat to the power structures of his day. But Jesus refused to be distracted from his mission by the likes of tin-pot dictators like Herod. He had no interest in their methods of exercising power.

Thursday

Luke 14

Conflict over the Sabbath laws was a dominant theme of Jesus' ministry.

In the Kingdom, human hierarchies will be nullified. Luke especially had an interest in the poor. God will upset worldly notions of status and honour. Social customs in Jesus' time were based on honour and shame. The Gospel radically overturned people's expectations. It called Christians to model in their lives the radical humility and hospitality that Jesus demonstrated.

Seemingly mundane things like welcoming the poor and the stranger as equals actually put the Kingdom of God into practice. They are signs of the reality of God breaking into the world. We might not think that the little things we do amount to much, but they are the "leaven" whose impact far outweighs their apparent importance.

Jesus reminds his disciples that following him comes at a great cost. Are you up to it? Jesus asked them. I heard of a pastor in Afghanistan who, when someone asked to join his church did everything he could to dissuade them because it was so dangerous. Sometimes we think that following Jesus is the answer to all our problems, whereas Jesus says it might just be the beginning. Do you think Christian faith would mean more to people in our society if it cost them more?

Friday

Luke 15

In this chapter we find three of Jesus' best-known parables – the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. The context is another source of conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment who are upset with the company Jesus kept at the table. In a culture where everyone was supposed to know their place, they said Jesus should be more discriminating about who he eats with.

These parables express one of the basic themes of the Gospel which is that God's grace is for those who need it, not for those who think they don't need it. There is joy in heaven over one wanderer who "returns home."

The most interesting and challenging of the parables is that of the lost, or prodigal son. If the father represents God, what does this say about the extravagance of God's forgiveness? Where does responsibility (the specialty of the "good" older brother) fit in?

Most church-goers probably have more in common with the older than with the younger brother. If it's the younger brother that's welcomed with open arms, though, where does that leave us? This parable really challenges our hidden assumptions about who "deserves" God's favour. As you read it, let the full force of what Jesus is saying sink into your heart and your mind.