THE GOSPEL OF LUKE
FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

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CONTENTS

About The Gospel Coalition ........................................ 4
Introduction to Luke .................................................. 5
About this Study .......................................................... 8

SESSION 1 JESUS AND THE CERTAINTY OF GOD ..................... 10
  (LUKE 1:1-4)

SESSION 2 JESUS THE SON OF GOD AND THE SON OF MARY .......... 20
  (LUKE 1-2)

SESSION 3 JESUS AND THE SPIRIT .................................... 38
  (LUKE 4)

SESSION 4 JESUS AND THE WORD OF GOD .......................... 52
  (LUKE 6)

SESSION 5 JESUS AND THE POWER OF GOD .......................... 64
  (LUKE 8:26-56)

SESSION 6 JESUS AND THE MISSION OF GOD ......................... 76
  (LUKE 9:51-62)

SESSION 7 JESUS AND THE COMPASSION OF GOD ..................... 86
  (LUKE 10:25-37)

SESSION 8 JESUS AND THE GRACE OF GOD .......................... 98
  (LUKE 15)

SESSION 9 JESUS AND THE SALVATION OF GOD ....................... 110
  (LUKE 19)

SESSION 10 JESUS THE LAMB OF GOD ............................... 120
  (LUKE 22-23)

SESSION 11 JESUS AND THE VICTORY OF GOD’S SON ................. 136
  (LUKE 24)

SESSION 12 JOINING HIS MISSION ................................... 148
  (LUKE 24)

LEADER GUIDE ......................................................... 156
The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church’s life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences, we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence, or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King’s highway, always aiming to provide gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that current- and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom He shed His life’s blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply His disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so that we truly speak and live for Him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. As pastors, we intend to do this in our churches through the ordinary means of His grace: prayer, the
ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE: FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Luke is one of four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that together comprise the first four books of the New Testament. These books are ancient biographies of Jesus that recount His life, death, and resurrection. To have a single biography of an ancient historical figure is considered a treasure by historians, but to have four of them is totally unprecedented. Indeed, we know more about Jesus than we do anyone else in antiquity. Each Gospel provides a portrait of Jesus which together gives us all we need to know in order to make important life decisions about who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him.

This study will focus on the Gospel of Luke, which is a stunning portrait of Jesus, the Son of God. Luke believes his book is the most important narrative we could ever read and invites his readers to witness His life, death, and resurrection and be transformed as a result. This is a book that presents the reader with an accurate account of Jesus but also a pathway to get to know Him personally. It is a book that calls the reader to repentance and to reorient their relationship with God through having Jesus reside at the very center.

In this story we see the life of Jesus on display and His mission in action. It starts with the circumstances around His birth and the birth of His cousin, John. We learn about Jesus’ mother, Mary, and her response to the news of the coming King and the surprising role she will play in it. In this book we get a glimpse of a twelve-year-old Jesus who reminds His parents who His real Father is. We witness Jesus follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, preach with conviction the coming kingdom of God, and boldly direct His ministry toward a cross. It is in the Holy City that Jesus would confront not just the rulers of His day, but also the ancient foes of sin, death, and the Devil. On a hill outside of this city, Jesus would do what He came to do—die for the sins of the world. We learn that Jesus not only died, but rose from the dead to the shock of even His closest followers. This is a book about Jesus, and Luke desires all who read his Gospel to encounter God’s Son for who He really is.
There are many vital themes in Luke's Gospel that are very important to understanding the whole of his message. Yet, there is a pattern in Jesus’ ministry in Luke’s account that we will pay particular attention to in this study: Luke highlights the gospel of Jesus going from the outside in. This theme is particularly important to point out because studying the Bible with other Christians can have an insular effect and cause a group to be inwardly focused. Luke's Gospel does not do that, and in this study we will show the “outside in” theme as a way to challenge Christians with the transformative work of the gospel in the lives of those considered to be “outsiders.”

From start to finish Luke articulates Jesus’ story as accessible to the unknowns, the outcast, the lost, and the hopeless. Jesus told the story of the stunning embrace of the returned prodigal son and the embittered response of his “righteous” brother. In doing so, Jesus shows that He desires both the irreligious and the very religious to turn to Him in repentance. We see Jesus’ invitation to Zacchaeus—the hated tax collector who was eavesdropping on Jesus from the outside—and the grumbling response of the crowd on the inside: “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” In Luke’s Gospel we witness Jesus look with compassion on a reviled, yet repentant criminal hanging on the cross next to His. In spite of it being the last moments before His death, Jesus took time to give the criminal an astonishing promise—a scandal that remains today. Jesus constantly challenged the “insiders” in Israel by highlighting “outsiders” being transformed by the gospel. He desired transformation in both camps.

This theme of the “outside in” starts as early as when the barren couple, Elizabeth and Zechariah, received word that prayers for a son, long since thought to be unanswered or forgotten, had in fact been heard by God. The story continues when Elizabeth’s cousin Mary celebrated the fact that God had chosen her, a poor and lowly girl, to be the bearer of His Son. This good news caused her to rejoice in the great reversal that God had lifted up those of humble estate and that those who appeared on the inside tract of God’s favor are “scattered,” “brought down,” and “sent away empty.” This theme resumes after Jesus’ wilderness experience when He was led by the Spirit to bring the good news into His hometown. A message that was widely accepted outside His hometown was bitterly rejected by insiders as they sneered, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” As Jesus’ ministry continued, Luke was careful to point out that Jesus’ desire was not just to call sinners, but to call sinners to repentance (see Luke 5:32). That is, His hope is to see sinners actually respond and find reconciliation with God. As a result, this return to God by outsiders causes insiders to reevaluate the biblical story and examine what the foundation of their relationship with God ought to be.
This “outside in” theme is evident in Luke’s narrative, but when one looks to Luke and his audience, this theme is reinforced. Luke knew what it was like to be on the outside of God’s people and sympathizes with outsiders by doing little things such as translating religious terms like “scribe” into more accessible terms like “lawyer.” As an educated urban Gentile, he would have been familiar with the local synagogue. Indeed, based on his understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, he must have listened in as an outsider for years. However, growing up he would have learned the limits of his access to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—being included in the great story of God’s people was impossible for someone like him. Yet, to great delight, the message of Jesus changed that for Luke. Jesus’ good news moved Luke from the “outside in” and against all odds transferred him into a full-fledged member of God’s community—sons of Abraham can indeed be called out by God from the stones (see Luke 3:8; 19:9). Also consider the recipient of Luke’s Gospel, Theophilus. His title “Most Excellent” hints that he was likely a wealthy government official. Like Luke, he was probably an educated Gentile who may have been considered by the Jewish community as a god-fearer. Full inclusion, however, was never going to be possible for him until Jesus changed that for Theophilus. The implications of the message of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel directly impact those who are on the outside looking in. Conversely, it is a message deeply challenging to “insiders” and is designed to reveal cracked foundations upon which many have built their relationship.

I envision four main areas of growth in this study of Luke’s Gospel. Luke’s first audience who read his Gospel understood it to be a biography of Jesus. Jesus is the main character of this book and everything in it is meant to show us some aspect of who He is. Jesus is the singular person we are meant to truly encounter by reading this narrative. In Luke 24, Jesus says that we don’t understand the Old Testament unless we read it pointing to Him. So too, Luke, writes this Gospel to display the beauty, strength, and salvation ultimately found in Jesus of Nazareth. We are to read our own lives, even the history of this world, through the lens of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The second area of growth is that Christians who participate in this study will experience a “Peter and Cornelius” moment in which they, like Peter, are awakened to God’s Spirit at work in unlikely places (see Acts 10). Luke’s special emphasis on the poor, sinners, and women shows surprising developments in groups of people who didn’t fit the mold of what most believed God’s people ought to look like. Hopefully this will cause an increasing confidence in the power of the gospel through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has done and will do surprising works in breaking barriers that many believers may feel are shatterproof. Seeing this happen will increase confidence in the power of the gospel to transform the most unlikely candidates.
The third area of growth is combating our tendency as believers toward an insular sort of Christianity. The hope is that Jesus’ challenge will ignite Christians toward a robust evangelicalism in which the gospel is unleashed, mission is engaged, and the Christian’s self-understanding is refined. When the gospel transforms those on the outside, it causes Christians on the inside to reform and rediscover the gospel afresh.

Finally, I hope that the results of this study will be individuals coming to understand who Jesus really is for the first time and to respond in repentance and faith. In the context of the study groups, there may be a handful of curious seekers engaging the gospel who are convicted by the Spirit of their sin, and will trust in Jesus. The hope is that many will experience what Jesus described as “repentance and forgiveness of sins,” and cherish the embrace of our loving Father who pronounces those once dead to now be alive. Moreover, that Christians would answer Luke’s challenge and be agents of the gospel in the lives of those outside of the study group: unbelieving friends, co-workers, and neighbors. This study should foster relationships to be formed so that non-Christians will have an authentic encounter with the gospel of Jesus.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The format of this short book is fairly straightforward. Begin by reading the Introduction, which will orient you to the text and connect the text with the broader context of Luke’s narrative.

Second, read the Text itself. This is, of course, the most important part of the study. Indeed, if you skip or even skim the text, then the other elements of the format lose their power. You need to read the text carefully and prayerfully if you hope for this group experience to have an impact.

Third, read the Commentary, which will be an explanation of the text and will help point out important themes in the narrative. You will also find devotional questions to consider in the sidebar.

After this is a Heads Up section that will address a difficult issue in the text or perhaps address a tension that the text brings up which may be discussed in group. This short section will not “solve” the problem, but will address it in such a way that you are not overly distracted from the main themes. Once these four have been read (presumably on your own before you meet with your small group), you are now ready for your group discussion.
The group discussion begins with a **Warm-Up Question** designed to get everyone in the group thinking about certain concepts of the passage, but in a way that is accessible to those who might be new to the group or who haven’t done the reading.

**VIDEO AND TRANSITION**

From there we move to the **Group Discussion** that will get everyone into the text and engaging Luke’s message. These questions start out as observational in nature (what does the text actually say?) and then transition to interpretation (what does the text mean?), and finally application (how can the text work in my life?).

**The Wrap** is the close of the group time. Spend about ten minutes reiterating the bullet points and sharing prayer requests before closing in prayer.

At the end is a **Take Home** component that will push the group members to put “flesh” on the discussion and apply it during the week. Recapping this section will be an important way to begin the group discussion the following week.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Please note that this study does not cover everything that Luke has for us in his beautiful Gospel. There are only twelve sessions in this study to fit within a normal Bible study semester and there are twenty-four chapters in Luke. So while I will endeavor to fill in some gaps in the narrative in the study sections, there will nevertheless be important parts of Luke’s story that we will skip over due to the limitations of this study.

Finally, when I started working on this short book, I was explaining to my wife the peculiar movement of the Gospel in Luke’s account. During my description, she stopped me and said, “Dave, it sounds like Luke is taking the gospel from the outside in.” I looked at her and thought to myself, “That is indeed what Luke is doing!” I am grateful to her for capturing this major theme in Luke’s Gospel and for giving me time to write this study during “off-hours” given a demanding deadline.
JESUS AND THE CERTAINTY OF GOD

SESSION 1
As we begin Luke’s Gospel we will discover something important about how he compiled this account: he used the accounts of eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry. Understanding Luke’s use of eyewitness accounts in this narrative is very important in order to understand his writing perspective. One of the great advantages of having eyewitness accounts is that an eyewitness not only recalled what actually happened, but also had time to reflect on why it happened. In other words, an eyewitness was not only able to provide a historical reconstruction of events (as vital as that was), but also to look back and ruminate on the real meaning of those events.

Having eyewitness accounts means Luke is not only able to provide us with a wooden historical account of the Jesus movement, but also to interpret for us what theological significance surrounds these historical events. In this way, Luke will show himself to be a valuable guide in understanding the historical and theological importance of Jesus.
We read the Bible for various reasons: to find encouragement during tough times, to learn more about ourselves and our purpose, and sometimes out of duty for the sake of being a “good” Christian. When is the last time you read simply to know more about Jesus?

**LUKE 1:1-4**

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

**COMMENTARY**

When we buy a book today, we have the freedom to flip through it in order to get a sense of the whole. In the Greco-Roman world, however, one could not just peruse quickly through a scroll. This made the first few lines of any book very important because it needed to orient the reader as to what the book was about. The beginning of Luke’s Gospel does a similar thing. He helps us right away by stating what he is intending to do with this Gospel: to write an “orderly account” of the events surrounding the Person and work of Jesus.

Luke acknowledges from the very beginning that others have tried to put together a narrative of the ministry of Jesus. This means that Luke was writing after Jesus had already ascended to the Father and when the mission of the church was in full swing. Luke is concerned about putting together an account of the ministry of Jesus that uses all the “eyewitnesses” still available. Eyewitnesses referred to individuals who actually followed Jesus during His ministry and interacted with Him personally (see Acts 1:21-22). Luke assures his readers that he has “followed all things closely” and is therefore qualified to pen an account of Jesus that can be trusted. This will not be a lightweight account of Jesus, but rather one that has been painstakingly researched and double-checked with the evidence available to Luke.

He has confidence he can do this because these events had already been “accomplished.” That is, Luke is concerned about things that had actually happened in history concerning Jesus. There is an important distinction between events that just
“happened” and events that were “accomplished” (perhaps a better word would be “fulfilled”). God had accomplished these things done among them! It is clear that these events were a fulfillment of what God had been up to in the history of the world. Jesus was a fulfillment of what God was doing with Israel and was a fulfillment of what God was doing through the Hebrew Scriptures. As Jesus pointed out in Luke 24:44, “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

The story Luke writes is arranged in such a way that it communicates the core meaning and message of Jesus. By “orderly account,” Luke is not primarily concerned with a chronology of Jesus’ ministry—though there is a basic time line that he is following in line with Mark and Matthew’s Gospels—rather, Luke is more concerned that his reader “gets” who Jesus really is. Luke arranged the narrative in such a way that the reader would have to come face to face with Jesus and be compelled to make decisions about Him along the way. Is Jesus really unique among all humans who have ever lived? Is Jesus really the Son of God? If so, what does that mean for each person who reads and understands this?

The introduction style Luke uses is very interesting and lets us know about his intended readership. This is an introduction that could be read by anyone, Christian or non-Christian, and its skillful construction would communicate to an educated reader that what is to come is a thoughtful and well-researched account. The way Luke writes is sophisticated and yet not so uppity that the average reader would be lost. Luke is convinced that the message he writes will be the most important message the reader will ever receive, and he crafts his introduction so that it catches everyone’s attention, regardless of religious or educational background.

Luke is writing this narrative to a particular person, Theophilus. This name means “God lover.” Scholars have disagreed on who this person was, and whether or not he was even a Christian. Some believe that he had heard about Jesus and was intrigued by Him, but needed more information before committing to Him. Other scholars believe he was a young disciple of Jesus who wanted to grow, and commissioned Luke to research and write an account of Jesus so he could do just that. Regardless of who Theophilus was, he was likely asking questions such as, “Could Jesus have really died and risen from the dead for me? If so, what difference does it make in my life?” While there has been a debate throughout church history as to the exact identity of this person, it is clear that the intended reader is someone interested in learning more about who Jesus is and desires to know the meaning of His life, death, and resurrection.

Luke says that he will provide for Theophilus something that is very difficult to
obtain: certainty. If you are a convinced Christian or not, as you read this know Luke is offering you a sense of certainty in a world filled with uncertainty. One of the events that Luke desires to give you certainty about is the physical resurrection of Jesus. Luke recounts for us not just the more famous apostles’ accounts of Jesus, but he gives a detailed account of two lesser-known followers as well. They walk with Jesus, talk with Him about His death, report of His resurrection, and listen to Him explain the significance of His activities from the Hebrew Scriptures. As Jesus departs from their presence, they are left with certainty that Jesus is alive, is indeed God’s Son, and worth following. While Luke doesn’t promise that all our questions can be answered, he does indicate that all of the major barriers that stand between you and a growing relationship with Jesus can be overcome.

**HEADS UP!**

Luke’s Gospel is special-ordered for folks who are unsure what they believe or for folks questioning why they believed in the first place. As you meet with your group, get to know the other participants and learn how this Gospel can apply in their lives just as you endeavor to learn how it applies in your own.

Begin by asking the group how they responded to the questions in the margins and the commentary. Take turns answering the warm-up question below. Be sure everyone has an opportunity to respond.

**WARM-UP (10:00)**

When you think of Jesus, which facet of His life, death, or resurrection would you like more clarity about? Is there anything about Jesus that you have heard about, but you don’t really know if it is true?
SHOW SESSION 1 VIDEO: JESUS AND THE CERTAINTY OF GOD (10:00)

*Video times for all videos are approximate.

In this video, Dr. Carson emphasizes that Luke did extensive research and met with several eyewitnesses of Jesus when composing his Gospel. Luke did this to provide assurance to Theophilus, that he might have certainty of the things that had happened. As a group, discuss why Luke’s record of eyewitness accounts provides assurance for believers.

GROUP DISCUSSION (20:00)

Spend the next several minutes engaging the discussion questions below. Try to avoid simple, pat answers and challenge yourself and the group to dig deeper into the truths the Gospel of Luke presents to us.

Luke wrote about events that had been “accomplished” by God. Talk about the most recent thing God accomplished in your life. How did you know it was a God thing and not just one of life’s coincidences?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Notice Luke’s attitude toward the message he wanted to share. What is your attitude toward sharing the story of Jesus?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
At this point, do you feel like you “get” who Jesus is? As a group, list some things you know about Him.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Luke claims that his book will provide “certainty” for this reader regarding the things about Jesus he had been taught. In a world today where there is very little certainty about many things, what difference would it make if you had more certainty about Jesus—His message, life, death, and resurrection? What difference would it make in your family? In your church?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Go around the group and everyone share what you hope to gain as a result of being a part of this small-group study.
WRAP (10:00)

- In Jesus we have all the certainty we need.
- Luke’s Gospel is an “orderly account.” That is, it is presented after extensive research as being valid and true.
- Luke’s findings represent the difference between events that have been accomplished and events that merely happened.

Close in prayer by asking God to bless each group member over the course of the week. Make time for the Take Home assignment below to enrich your experience with the Gospel of Luke.

TAKE HOME

This week’s take home assignment is one about observation. This week listen intentionally at work, school, and home to different things people say about Jesus or Christianity. What are the common things people say? Is it generally positive or negative? Do you think what they are saying is true? Perhaps no one said anything about Him, if so, what do you think that means? Make note of your observation and discuss them in the study next week.
DAVID MORLAN is co-founder and teaching pastor of Fellowship Denver Church located in downtown Denver. He holds a PhD in New Testament from Durham University (UK) and is the author of Conversion in Luke and Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Exploration. He married Renée in the summer of 2000, and they have three boisterous sons: Will, Ian, and Beckett.

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The Gospel of Luke presents a stunning portrait of Jesus, the Son of God. Luke's Gospel not only provides an accurate account of Jesus, but also the pathway to get to know Him personally. It's a book that calls us to repentance and reorients our relationship with God with Jesus residing at the very center.

Because Luke knew what it was like to be on the outside of God's people he clearly sympathizes with outsiders. As a result, the implications of the message of Jesus in Luke's Gospel particularly resonates with those who are on the outside looking in. The Gospel of Luke: From the Outside In has been created for groups as an approach to understanding and applying these implications for the sake of kingdom principles in four distinct ways:

• To display the beauty, strength, and salvation ultimately found in Jesus of Nazareth
• To awaken group members to God's Spirit at work in unlikely places
• To counter our tendency as believers towards an inward sort of Christianity
• To move individuals to an understanding of who Jesus really is and help them respond in repentance and faith

Also AVAILABLE: LEADER KIT INCLUDES 2 DVDS FEATURING TEACHING VIDEOS WITH D.A. CARSON FOR A 12-WEEK SMALL GROUP STUDY. ITEM 005558731

ABOUT THE GOSPEL COALITION

The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply His disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. We desire to champion the gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines. We yearn to work with all who, in addition to embracing our confession and theological vision for ministry, seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.