



MAX LUCADO

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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OF LUKE





WITH MAX LUCADO

**BOOK OF
LUKE**
JESUS, THE SON OF MAN

MAX LUCADO

Prepared by
THE LIVINGSTONE CORPORATION



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Life Lessons with Max Lucado—Book of Luke

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HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

This is a peculiar book you are holding. Words crafted in another language. Deeds done in a distant era. Events recorded in a far-off land. Counsel offered to a foreign people. This is a peculiar book.

It's surprising that anyone reads it. It's too old. Some of its writings date back five thousand years. It's too bizarre. The book speaks of incredible floods, fires, earthquakes, and people with supernatural abilities. It's too radical. The Bible calls for undying devotion to a carpenter who called himself God's Son.

Logic says this book shouldn't survive. Too old, too bizarre, too radical.

The Bible has been banned, burned, scoffed, and ridiculed. Scholars have mocked it as foolish. Kings have branded it as illegal. A thousand times over, the grave has been dug and the dirge has begun, but somehow the Bible never stays in the grave. Not only has it survived; it has thrived. It is the single most popular book in all of history. It has been the best-selling book in the world for years!

There is no way on earth to explain it. Which perhaps is the only explanation. For The answer? The Bible's durability is not found on earth; it is found in heaven. the millions who have tested its claims and claimed its promises, there is but one answer: the Bible is God's book and God's voice.

As you read it, you would be wise to give some thought to two questions. What is the purpose of the Bible? and How do I study the Bible? Time spent reflecting on these two issues will greatly enhance your Bible study.

What is the purpose of the Bible?

Let the Bible itself answer that question.

Since you were a child you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise. And that wisdom leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 3:15 NCV)

The purpose of the Bible? Salvation. God's highest passion is to get his children home. His book, the Bible, describes his plan of salvation. The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God's plan and passion to save his children.

That is the reason this book has endured through the centuries. It dares to tackle the toughest questions about life: Where do I go after I die? Is there a God?

What do I do with my fears? The Bible offers answers to these crucial questions. It is the treasure map that leads us to God's highest treasure—eternal life.

But how do we use the Bible? Countless copies of Scripture sit unread on bookshelves and nightstands simply because people don't know how to read it. What can we do to make the Bible real in our lives?

The clearest answer is found in the words of Jesus. He promised:

Ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you. (Matt. 7:7 NCV)

The first step in understanding the Bible is asking God to help

us. We should read prayerfully. If anyone understands God's Word, it is because of God and not the reader.

But the Helper will teach you everything and will cause you to remember all that I told you. The Helper is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name. (John 14:26 NCV)

Before reading the Bible, pray. Invite God to speak to you. Don't go to Scripture looking for your idea; go searching for his.

Not only should we read the Bible prayerfully; we should read it carefully. *Search and you will find* is the pledge. The Bible is not a newspaper to be skimmed but rather a mine to be quarried.

Search for it like silver, and hunt for it like hidden treasure. Then you will understand respect for the Lord, and you will find that you know God. (Prov. 2:4-5 NCV)

Any worthy find requires effort. The Bible is no exception. To understand the Bible you don't have to be brilliant, but you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and search.

Be a worker who is not ashamed and who uses the true teaching in the right way. (2 Tim. 2:15 NCV)

Here's a practical point. Study the Bible a bit at a time. Hunger is not satisfied by eating twenty-one meals in one sitting once a week. The body needs a steady diet to remain strong. So does the soul. When God sent food to his people in the wilderness, he didn't provide loaves already made. Instead, he sent them manna in the shape of "*thin flakes like frost . . . on the desert ground*" (Ex. 16:14 NCV).

God gave manna in limited portions. God sends spiritual food the same way. He opens the heavens with just enough

nutrients for today's hunger. He provides *"a command here, a command there. A rule here, a rule there. A little lesson here, a little lesson there"* (Isa. 28:10 NCV).

Don't be discouraged if your reading reaps a small harvest. Some days a lesser portion is all that is needed. What is important is to search every day for that day's message. A steady diet of God's Word over a lifetime builds a healthy soul and mind.

A little girl returned from her first day at school. Her mom asked, "Did you learn anything?"

"Apparently not enough," the girl responded, "I have to go back tomorrow and the next day and the next . . ."

Such is the case with learning. And such is the case with Bible study. Understanding comes little by little over a lifetime.

There is a third step in understanding the Bible. After the asking and seeking comes the knocking. After you ask and search, then knock.

Knock, and the door will open for you. (Matt. 7:7 NCV)

To knock is to stand at God's door. To make yourself available. To climb the steps, cross the porch, stand at the doorway, and volunteer. Knocking goes beyond the realm of thinking and into the realm of acting.

To knock is to ask, What can I do? How can I obey? Where can I go?

It's one thing to know what to do. It's another to do it. But for those who do it, those who choose to obey, a special reward awaits them.

The truly happy are those who carefully study God's perfect

law that makes people free, and they continue to study it. They do not forget what they heard, but they obey what God's teaching says. Those who do this will be made happy. (James 1:25 NCV)

What a promise. Happiness comes to those who do what they read! It's the same with medicine. If you only read the label but ignore the pills, it won't help. It's the same with food. If you only read the recipe but never cook, you won't be fed. And it's the same with the Bible. If you only read the words but never obey, you'll never know the joy God has promised.

Ask. Search. Knock. Simple, isn't it? Why don't you give it a try? If you do, you'll see why you are holding the most remarkable book in history.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF LUKE

Nearly two thousand years ago, a doctor named Luke began a letter to a friend with these words:

Many have tried to report on the things that happened among us. They have written the same things that we learned from others—the people who saw those things from the beginning and served God by telling people his message. Since I myself have studied everything carefully from the beginning, most excellent Theophilus, it seemed good for me to write it out for you. I arranged it in order to help you know that what you have been taught is true (1:1–4 NCV).

Luke and Theophilus shared two loves: a love for Christ and a love for the facts. They didn't want legends; they wanted truth. And so Dr. Luke begins to sort the truth and report the facts to Theophilus. The result is part letter and part research paper.

It is part letter because it was written for a friend. What a bond must have existed between these two that Luke would labor so! It is part research paper, because Luke had *studied everything carefully from the beginning*, and he wanted Theophilus to benefit from his study.

Can't you envision him in the home of Mary? "Tell me again what happened in Bethlehem." Can't you see him peppering Matthew with questions? "Let me see if I got this parable right." Or on long walks with Peter? "When you denied him the third time, did Jesus know?"

With the skill of a surgeon, Luke probes for truth. Why? So his friend could know that what he had been taught was true. Did Luke have any idea that millions of us would benefit from his study? I doubt it. All he did was share the truth with a friend.

Can you imagine what would happen if we all did the same?

LESSON ONE

HOPE IN GOD

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REFLECTION

It's hard not to envy good fortune. Someone else's windfall almost always raises a few thoughts of *Why not me?* Some people can rejoice at another's good fortune. But some people can't, and they become victims of bitterness. Think of a time when God did an amazing work in a friend's life. How did you react? In what ways did his or her blessing or benefit kindle hope in your life?

SITUATION

Having explained to Theophilus the purpose behind his letter, Luke immediately wades into the historical account. He has to choose a starting point, and he decides the best one is a preliminary event that involved an elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Luke's biography of Jesus begins with the birth of John, who became known as the Baptizer.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 1:5–25 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

⁵*During the time Herod ruled Judea, there was a priest named*

Zechariah who belonged to Abijah's group. Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, came from the family of Aaron.

⁶Zechariah and Elizabeth truly did what God said was good. They did everything the Lord commanded and were without fault in keeping his law. ⁷But they had no children, because Elizabeth could not have a baby, and both of them were very old.

⁸One day Zechariah was serving as a priest before God, because his group was on duty.

⁹According to the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰There were a great many people outside praying at the time the incense was offered. ¹¹Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, standing on the right side of the incense table. ¹²When he saw the angel, Zechariah was startled and frightened. ¹³But the angel said to him, "Zechariah, don't be afraid. God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴He will bring you joy and gladness, and many people will be happy because of his birth. ¹⁵John will be a great man for the Lord. He will never drink wine or beer, and even from birth, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶He will help many people of Israel return to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will go before the Lord in spirit and power like Elijah. He will make peace between parents and their children and will bring those who are not obeying God back to the right way of thinking, to make a people ready for the coming of the Lord."

¹⁸*Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I know that what you say is true? I am an old man, and my wife is old, too.”*

¹⁹*The angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand before God, who sent me to talk to you and to tell you this good news.*

²⁰*Now, listen! You will not be able to speak until the day these things happen, because you did not believe what I told you. But they will really happen.”*

²¹*Outside, the people were still waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he was staying so long in the Temple.*

²²*When Zechariah came outside, he could not speak to them, and they knew he had seen a vision in the Temple. He could only make signs to them and remained unable to speak.*

²³*When his time of service at the Temple was finished, he went home.*

²⁴*Later, Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and did not go out of her house for five months. Elizabeth said,*

²⁵*“Look what the Lord has done for me! My people were ashamed of me, but now the Lord has taken away that shame.”*

NKJV

⁵*There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the*

commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. ⁷But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

⁸So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, ⁹according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. ¹⁰And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹²And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. ¹⁵For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

¹⁹And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to

you and bring you these glad tidings. ²⁰“But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.”

²¹And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. ²²But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

²³And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. ²⁴Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, ²⁵“Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

EXPLORATION

1. What kind of reputation did Zechariah and Elizabeth have in their community?
2. How did Zechariah and Elizabeth cope with the humiliation of childlessness?
3. The angel promised a child. In what way did this offer hope to Zechariah in his situation?
4. Why did Zechariah doubt God’s promise?
5. In what way did Elizabeth react to the fulfillment of the angel’s prophecy?

INSPIRATION

Hope is not what you expect; it is what you would never dream. It is a wild, improbable tale with a pinch-me-I'm-dreaming ending. It's Abraham adjusting his bifocals so he can see not his grandson, but his son. It's Moses standing in the Promised Land not with Aaron or Miriam at his side, but with Elijah and the transfigured Christ. It's Zechariah left speechless at the sight of wife Elizabeth, gray-headed and pregnant. And it is the two Emmaus-bound pilgrims reaching out to take a piece of bread only to see the hands from which it is offered are pierced.

Hope is not a granted wish or a favor performed; no, it is far greater than that. It is a zany, unpredictable dependence on a God who loves to surprise us out of our socks and be there in the flesh to see our reaction. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. Why do we, like Zechariah, sometimes doubt God's desire to fulfill our deepest longings?
7. What comfort or encouragement does this passage offer to us when we find ourselves in seemingly hopeless situations?
8. What steps can we take to deal with feelings of hopelessness?
9. In what way does this passage affect your attitude toward

your frustrations and problems?

10. What is keeping you from expecting God to do spectacular things in your life?

11. In what way can you demonstrate your faith in God's promises?

LIFE LESSONS

There's a difference between expecting God to be faithful and anticipating the specific ways he will demonstrate his faithfulness. The first attitude hopes in God's constancy and wisdom; the second may assume that we know what's best. If we get the two confused, we are liable to be disappointed with the results. Even though God always gives us good things in the long run, we're sometimes disappointed because he didn't answer our prayers according to our exact agenda. This passage doesn't forbid us to tell God what we want. It simply teaches us to express even our most fervent desires within the boundaries that God ultimately knows best. He sees what we can't see; he knows what we don't know. Sometimes, as in Zechariah and Elizabeth's case, the answer is delayed because a much larger plan is in motion.

DEVOTION

Thank you, Father, for giving us hope in a world of broken promises and dashed dreams. You have proven your trustworthiness by keeping your promises to your people. O

Father, you are our only hope. Strengthen our dependence on you, give us patience to wait for your perfect timing, and teach us to rejoice in your goodness.

For more Bible passages on hope, see Psalms 42:5; 62:5; 130:7; Proverbs 23:18; Jeremiah 29:11; Lamentations 3:21–24; Romans 12:12; 15:4; 1 Timothy 4:9–10; 6:17; Titus 1:1–2.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 1:1–3:38.

JOURNALING

What personal hopes or dreams am I tempted to give up on?
How can I entrust them to God?

LESSON TWO

FAITH AT WORK

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REFLECTION

Faith may be a spiritual concept, but it certainly has practical characteristics that make it an essential component of life. Actions based on what cannot be proved make up much of our daily routine. We rarely examine a chair before we sit in it, or have a car checked out by a mechanic each time we want to drive to work. We take many things by faith. But life has a way of testing our faith, particularly when it comes to our relationship with God. Think of a time when you have seen faith at work. What were the results of that faith?

SITUATION

As the crowds grew during the early days of Jesus' ministry, they quickly divided into two camps: the spectators and the participants. As the following scene opens, Jesus is teaching in a house filled wall-to-wall with people. They are clamoring for Jesus' attention. Among them are people trying to figure out Jesus' plan. Does he fit the present acceptable categories, or is he a maverick who will soon be forgotten? They are watching his every move and sifting every word. Then the ceiling begins to cave in.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 5:17–26 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹⁷One day as Jesus was teaching the people, the Pharisees and teachers of the law from every town in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were there. The Lord was giving Jesus the power to heal people. ¹⁸Just then, some men were carrying on a mat a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and put him down before Jesus. ¹⁹But because there were so many people there, they could not find a way in. So they went up on the roof and lowered the man on his mat through the ceiling into the middle of the crowd right before Jesus. ²⁰Seeing their faith, Jesus said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

²¹The Jewish teachers of the law and the Pharisees thought to themselves, "Who is this man who is speaking as if he were God? Only God can forgive sins."

²²But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, "Why are you thinking these things?"

²³Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? ²⁴But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, stand up, take your mat, and go home."

²⁵At once the man stood up before them, picked up his mat, and went home, praising God. ²⁶All the people were fully amazed and began to praise God. They were filled with much

respect and said, "Today we have seen amazing things!"

NKJV

¹⁷Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. ¹⁸Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. ¹⁹And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.

²⁰When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

²¹And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

²²But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'? ²⁴But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

²⁵Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had

*been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.
26And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today!”*

EXPLORATION

1. This group of men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. What do you think they hoped Jesus would do for him?
2. What risks and obstacles did the men face because of the crowd around Jesus?
3. What were the pros and cons of their plan to let their friend down through the roof?
4. What did these men’s actions—that they would go to any length to get their friend to Jesus—reveal about their perception of Jesus?
5. Why was Jesus’ first response to forgive rather than to heal?

INSPIRATION

Whether he was born paralyzed or became paralyzed—the end result was the same: total dependence on others . . . When people looked at him, they didn’t see the man; they saw a body in need of a miracle. That’s not what Jesus saw, but that’s what the people saw. And that’s certainly what his friends saw. So they did what any of us would do for a friend. They tried to get him some help. . . .

By the time his friends arrived at the place, the house was full.

People jammed the doorways. Kids sat in the windows. Others peeked over shoulders. How would this small band of friends ever attract Jesus' attention? They had to make a choice. Do we go in or give up?

What would have happened had the friends given up? What if they had shrugged their shoulders and mumbled something about the crowd being big and dinner getting cold and turned and left? After all, they had done a good deed in coming this far. Who could fault them for turning back? You can only do so much for somebody. But these friends hadn't done enough.

One said that he had an idea. The four huddled over the paralytic and listened to the plan to climb to the top of the house, cut through the roof, and lower their friend down with their sashes.

It was risky—they could fall. It was dangerous—he could fall. It was unorthodox—deroofting is antisocial. It was intrusive—Jesus was busy. But it was their only chance to see Jesus. So they climbed to the roof.

Faith does these things. Faith does the unexpected. And faith gets God's attention. . . .

Jesus was moved by the scene of faith. So he applauds—if not with his hands, at least with his heart. And not only does he applaud, he blesses. And we witness a divine love burst.

The friends want him to heal their friend. But Jesus won't settle for a simple healing of the body—he wants to heal the soul. He leapfrogs the physical and deals with the spiritual. To heal the body is temporal; to heal the soul is eternal . . . So strong was his love for this crew of faith that he went beyond their appeal and went straight to the cross.

Jesus already knows the cost of grace. He already knows the price of forgiveness. But he offers it anyway. Love bursts in his heart . . .

And though we can't hear it here, the angels can hear him there. All of heaven must pause as another burst of love declares the only words that really matter:

“Your sins are forgiven.” (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. In what way did the four friends' faith in Jesus affect the life of the paralyzed man?
7. In what ways does your faith affect others around you?
8. List some practical ways we can show our faith in Jesus Christ.
9. What risks or obstacles have you faced in living out your beliefs?
10. In what way have those difficulties stretched and strengthened your faith?
11. In what ways have you seen God bless people who trust him?

LIFE LESSONS

This episode in Jesus' life offers us two challenging examples as we seek to live as disciples of Jesus. We can identify with

the paralyzed man, and we can identify with his friends. Each role requires a certain kind of faith. The paralyzed man trusted both his friends and Jesus. We don't know if he asked them for help or if he just went along with their plan, but feeling himself lowered through the roof must have been a moment of testing. The friends had to escalate their faith to meet the obstacles they encountered. Their persistence was rewarded. We can experience the same kinds of rewards for exercising our faith in God throughout life. The paralyzed man was not only healed but also forgiven. This reminds us that no matter how bold our faith, God's capacity to go beyond what we could ask or imagine will not be exceeded.

DEVOTION

Father, when all the doors are closed, give us the courage to persevere. When no solutions are in sight, help us to find new ways to break through the barriers that separate us from you. May we persistently seek your face and daily demonstrate our faith in you.

For more Bible passages on faith, see 2 Chronicles 20:20; Matthew 9:2; Mark 11:22; Luke 7:9; John 8:30; Acts 3:16; Romans 4:16–25; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 16:13; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:8–9; 1 Timothy 6:11–12; Hebrews 11:1–40; James 2:14–26.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 4:1–5:39.

JOURNALING

What step of faith am I willing to take this week to be closer to God?

LESSON THREE

**PRAYER THAT
STRENGTHENS**

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REFLECTION

Think of a time when you felt strengthened through prayer. Perhaps it was a time when someone came alongside you in a moment of crisis, and his or her prayer lifted you “out of the pit” and gave you hope. Perhaps it was a moment when you realized you had nowhere else and no one else to turn to except to God; yet when you stopped to pray, God seemed to be patiently waiting for you. Try to put into words the effects of that experience.

SITUATION

Curfews come in many shapes and sizes. Jesus lived in a land of Sabbath curfew. The letter of the third commandment to “keep the Sabbath holy” had been examined and applied so closely that the spirit and purpose of God’s gift of Sabbath had been lost. The controversy Jesus stirred up by honoring God on the Sabbath seems almost irrational to us, yet it shows that legalism without heart often produces harsh results. Jesus was chastised by the religious leaders for doing something on the Sabbath that they couldn’t do even on their best day. They devalued the healing he offered on the Sabbath because they were more concerned with keeping up appearances than with pleasing God.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 6:1–16 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹One Sabbath day Jesus was walking through some fields of grain. His followers picked the heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. ²Some Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”

³Jesus answered, “Have you not read what David did when he and those with him were hungry?⁴ He went into God’s house and took and ate the holy bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he gave some to the people who were with him.”⁵ Then Jesus said to the Pharisees, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day.”

⁶On another Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man with a crippled right hand was there. ⁷The teachers of the law and the Pharisees were watching closely to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath day so they could accuse him.

⁸But he knew what they were thinking, and he said to the man with the crippled hand, “Stand up here in the middle of everyone.” The man got up and stood there. ⁹Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath day: to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to destroy it?”¹⁰ Jesus looked around at all of them and said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” The man held out his hand, and it was healed.

¹¹But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were very angry and discussed with each other what they could do to Jesus.

¹²At that time Jesus went off to a mountain to pray, and he spent the night praying to God. ¹³The next morning, Jesus called his followers to him and chose twelve of them, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴Simon (Jesus named him Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, ¹⁵Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon (called the Zealot), ¹⁶Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who later turned Jesus over to his enemies.

NKJV

¹Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grain-fields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands.

²And some of the Pharisees said to them, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”

³But Jesus answering them said, “Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴how he went into the house of God, took and ate the show bread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?” ⁵And He said to them, “The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

⁶Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered

the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered.⁷ So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him.⁸ But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, "Arise and stand here." And he arose and stood.⁹ Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?"¹⁰ And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.¹¹ But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

¹²Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

¹³And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

¹⁴Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew;¹⁵ Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; ¹⁶Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

EXPLORATION

1. What kind of power struggles did Jesus have with the religious leaders of his day?

2. How did Jesus deal with the accusations of the Pharisees and teachers of the law?
3. Why did Jesus' actions enrage the religious leaders?
4. In what way did Jesus cope with the pressures of his ministry?
5. Why did Jesus spend the night in prayer before choosing the twelve disciples?

INSPIRATION

How long has it been since you let God have you? I mean really *have* you? How long since you gave him a portion of undiluted, uninterrupted time listening for his voice? Apparently Jesus did. He made a deliberate effort to spend time with God.

Spend much time reading about the listening life of Jesus and a distinct pattern emerges. He spent regular time with God, praying, and listening. Mark says, "Early the next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus woke and left the house.

He went to a lonely place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35 NCV). Luke tells us, "Jesus often slipped away to be alone so he could pray" (Luke 5:16 NCV).

Let me ask the obvious. If Jesus, the Son of God, the sinless Savior of humankind, thought it worthwhile to clear his calendar to pray, wouldn't we be wise to do the same?

Not only did he spend regular time with God in prayer, he spent regular time in God's Word. Of course we don't find Jesus pulling a leather-bound New Testament from his satchel and

reading it. We do, however, see the stunning example of Jesus, in the throes of the wilderness temptation, using the Word of God to deal with Satan. Three times he is tempted, and each time he repels the attack with the phrase: “It is written in the Scriptures” (Luke 4:4, 8, 12 NCV), and then he quotes a verse. Jesus is so familiar with Scripture that he not only knows the verse, he knows how to use it.

And then there’s the occasion when Jesus was asked to read in the synagogue. He is handed the book of Isaiah the prophet. He finds the passage, reads it, and declares, “While you heard these words just now, they were coming true!” (Luke 4:21 NCV). We are given the picture of a person who knows his way around the Scripture and can recognize its fulfillment. If Jesus thought it wise to grow familiar with the Bible, shouldn’t we do the same?

If we are to be just like Jesus—if we are to have ears that hear God’s voice—then we have just found two habits worth imitating: the habits of prayer and Bible reading. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. What lessons can we learn from Jesus’ spiritual habits while he lived on earth?
7. List some benefits of extended times of prayer.
8. In what way does Jesus’ example inspire you to change the way you deal with the pressures of your job or ministry?
9. Why is prayer essential to effective ministry?

10. What happens when we try to do God's work in our own strength?
11. What practical steps can you take to depend more on God to help you face the challenges in your life?

LIFE LESSONS

The continual balance in Jesus' life between time spent with God in prayer and time spent in Scripture explains many of his responses. He based answers on God's Word, demonstrating that he had spent time thinking through ways in which the Scriptures could be used, as well as misused. The religious leaders misused Scripture. When they were only concerned about the law and keeping the Sabbath, then the real purpose for the Sabbath was neglected and lost. Jesus challenges us to ask the questions: "Do I know why I'm obeying? Am I doing this for the right reasons?"

DEVOTION

Lord, help us to follow in your footsteps. Teach us to pray, during times of joy or heartache, confusion or calm. When we face difficult decisions, help us to turn to you for guidance. And when life is easy, keep us from thinking that we can make it on our own. Remind us that only you can help us live victoriously.

For more Bible passages on the benefits of prayer, see Deuteronomy 4:7; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 21:22; Mark

11:22–26; Acts 10:2–5; Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Timothy 4:4–5; James 5:13–18.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 6:1–49.

JOURNALING

When can I spend an extended time praying about a specific decision or challenge in my life?

LESSON FOUR

**CHRIST'S
COMPASSION**

**MAX
LUCADO**

REFLECTION

Compassion frequently arrives in little gestures, such as a tactful suggestion that prevents injury (“Watch your step, sir. There’s a hole in front of you”). Compassion also makes larger gestures, such as someone who pulls out of the traffic to change a tire for a stranded motorist. Think of a time when someone showed compassion to you. How did this make you feel?

SITUATION

As Jesus’ popularity grew, his traveling became more complicated. A crowd followed him everywhere. When he approached the village of Nain, the effect of the people might have been called a “crush hour,” all the more because a procession of villagers was leaving town for a funeral. The two crowds met on the edge of town.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 7:11–23 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹¹*Soon afterwards Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his*

followers and a large crowd traveled with him.¹² When he came near the town gate, he saw a funeral. A mother, who was a widow, had lost her only son. A large crowd from the town was with the mother while her son was being carried out.¹³ When the Lord saw her, he felt very sorry for her and said, "Don't cry."¹⁴ He went up and touched the coffin, and the people who were carrying it stopped. Jesus said, "Young man, I tell you, get up!"¹⁵ And the son sat up and began to talk. Then Jesus gave him back to his mother.

¹⁶All the people were amazed and began praising God, saying, "A great prophet has come to us! God has come to help his people."

¹⁷This news about Jesus spread through all Judea and into all the places around there.

¹⁸John's followers told him about all these things. He called for two of his followers¹⁹ and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?"

²⁰When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you with this question: 'Are you the One who is to come, or should we wait for someone else?'"

²¹At that time, Jesus healed many people of their sicknesses, diseases, and evil spirits, and he gave sight to many blind people.²² Then Jesus answered John's followers, "Go tell John what you saw and heard here. The blind can see, the crippled can walk, and people with skin diseases are healed. The deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good

News is preached to the poor. ²³Those who do not stumble in their faith because of me are blessed!"

NKJV

¹¹Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. ¹²And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."¹⁴Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."¹⁵So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

¹⁶Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people."

¹⁷And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

¹⁸Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. ¹⁹And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

²⁰When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist

has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'"²¹And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.

²²Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them."²³"And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

EXPLORATION

1. Jesus and his followers encountered a funeral procession near the city of Nain. Why do you think Jesus chose to resurrect the boy?
2. Describe Jesus' compassion for the people in the funeral procession.
3. In what way did Jesus specifically show his compassion for the mother who had lost her son?
4. What good came from the miracle Jesus performed?
5. What does it mean to stumble or be offended in our faith?

INSPIRATION

Two crowds. One entering the city and one leaving. They couldn't be more diverse. The group arriving buzzes with laughter and conversation. They follow Jesus. The group

leaving the city is solemn—a herd of sadness hypnotized by the requiem of death. Above them rides the reason for their grief—a cold body on a wicker stretcher.

The woman at the back of the procession is the mother. She has walked this trail before. It seems like just yesterday she buried the body of her husband. Her son walked with her then. Now she walks alone, quarantined in her sadness. . . .

The followers of Jesus stop and step aside as the procession shadows by. The blanket of mourning muffles the laughter of the disciples. No one spoke. What could they say? . . .

Jesus, however, knew what to say and what to do. When he saw the mother, his heart began to break . . . and his lips began to tighten. He glared at the angel of death that hovered over the body of the boy. “Not this time, Satan. This boy is mine.”

At that moment the mother walked in front of him. Jesus spoke to her. “Don’t cry.” She stopped and looked into this stranger’s face. If she wasn’t shocked by his presumption, you can bet some of the witnesses were.

Don’t cry? Don’t cry? What kind of request is that?

A request only God can make.

Jesus stepped toward the bier and touched it. The pallbearers stopped marching.

The mourners ceased moaning. As Jesus stared at the boy, the crowd was silent.

Jesus turned his attention to the dead boy. “Young man,” his voice was calm, “come back to life again.”

The living stood motionless as the dead came to life. Wooden fingers moved. Gray-pale cheeks blushed. The dead man sat up

...

Jesus must have smiled as the two embraced. Stunned, the crowd broke into cheers and applause. They hugged each other and slapped Jesus on the back. Someone proclaimed the undeniable, “God has come to help his people.”

Jesus gave the woman much more than her son. He gave her a secret—a whisper that was overheard by us. “That,” he said pointing at the cot, “that is fantasy. This,” he grinned, putting an arm around the boy, “this is reality.” (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. What do you think motivated Jesus to heal the sick, deliver the demon-possessed, and give sight to the blind?
7. What new insight can you gain from this passage about Christ’s character?
8. What difference does it make in our lives to know that Jesus had mercy on people?
9. What keeps us from acknowledging and appreciating what Jesus has done for us?
10. In what tangible way can we thank Jesus for the love and mercy he has shown to us?
11. Think of one person to whom you could show more Christian compassion. What has kept you from taking action on that awareness?

LIFE LESSONS

Compassion grows out of our faith and obedience. We don't practice compassion just because it "works." We treat others with compassion because our Lord showed compassion and we want to emulate him, and because all people are loved by God. One way to look at it is this: treat people in such a way that if they want to take "revenge" on you, they will have to be nice. If you want to take seriously Jesus' call to discipleship, one evaluation question you can ask yourself is, "Have I treated with compassion the people God has placed in my life today?"

How are you doing in this area?

DEVOTION

Lord, thank you for taking the time to keep a poor widow from a life of loneliness. Thanks for the length you went to, to express care. It helps us see your power over death and your deep love and compassion for needy people. Our hearts overflow with gratitude for the mercy you have shown to us. Receive our praise and help us to show your love to the people around us.

For more Bible passages on Christ's compassion, see Matthew 9:35–36; 14:13–14; 15:32–39; 20:29–34; Mark 1:40–42; 6:34; 8:2.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 7:1–50.

JOURNALING

How has Jesus shown compassion to me?

LESSON FIVE

OBEYING
GOD'S WORD

MAX
LUCADO

REFLECTION

Consider the first time you heard and understood the gospel message. Think about the setting and how the message was delivered to you. Try to remember what else was going on in your life at the time. Looking back, were there some experiences that prepared you for that moment? What was your response?

SITUATION

Jesus shaped his style of communication to the group who was listening. This is the first time in Luke that Jesus used the unique stories called *parables*. These brief tales obviously had a point, but the point wasn't always obvious. They provoked pondering. They invited questions. Those content to simply hear a story went away satisfied but ignorant. Those who asked for deeper understanding discovered truth.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 8:4–15 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

⁴When a great crowd was gathered, and people were coming to Jesus from every town, he told them this story:

⁵“A farmer went out to plant his seed. While he was planting, some seed fell by the road.

People walked on the seed, and the birds ate it up. ⁶Some seed fell on rock, and when it began to grow, it died because it had no water. ⁷Some seed fell among thorny weeds, but the weeds grew up with it and choked the good plants. ⁸And some seed fell on good ground and grew and made a hundred times more.”

As Jesus finished the story, he called out, “You people who can hear me, listen!”

⁹Jesus’ followers asked him what this story meant.

¹⁰Jesus said, “You have been chosen to know the secrets about the kingdom of God. But I use stories to speak to other people so that:

They will look, but they may not see.

They will listen, but they may not understand.’

¹¹“This is what the story means: The seed is God’s message.

¹²The seed that fell beside the road is like the people who hear God’s teaching, but the devil comes and takes it away from them so they cannot believe it and be saved. ¹³The seed that fell on rock is like those who hear God’s teaching and accept it gladly, but they don’t allow the teaching to go deep into their lives. They believe for a while, but when trouble comes, they give up. ¹⁴The seed that fell among the thorny weeds is like those who hear God’s teaching, but they let the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life keep them from growing and producing good fruit. ¹⁵And the seed that fell on

the good ground is like those who hear God's teaching with good, honest hearts and obey it and patiently produce good fruit.

NKJV

⁴And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable:⁵“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. ⁶Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. ⁷And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. ⁸But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

⁹Then His disciples asked Him, saying, “What does this parable mean?”

¹⁰And He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that

‘Seeing they may not see,

And hearing they may not understand.’

¹¹“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

¹²Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they

should believe and be saved. ¹³But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. ¹⁴Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. ¹⁵But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.

EXPLORATION

1. Why do you think Jesus told such an unexpected story to such a large crowd?
2. How does this passage help you understand why Jesus used stories and parables to teach people?
3. In the parable, what do the seed and the four soils represent?
4. What interferes with people's acceptance of the gospel?
5. What evidence in a person's life proves that God's Word has taken root?

INSPIRATION

Anyone near Christ for any length of time heard it from Jesus himself. *"The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them"* (Luke 19:10 NCV). *"The Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and to give his life as a*

ransom for many people” (Mark 10:45 NCV).

The heart of Jesus was relentlessly focused on one task. The day he left the carpentry shop of Nazareth he had one ultimate aim; the cross of Calvary. He was so focused that his final words were, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30 NCV).

How could Jesus say he was finished? There were still the hungry to feed, the sick to heal, the untaught to instruct, and the unloved to love. How could he say he was finished? Simple. He had completed his designated task. His commission was fulfilled. The painter could set aside his brush, the sculptor lay down his chisel, the writer put away his pen. The job was done.

Wouldn't you like to be able to say the same? Wouldn't you love to look back on your life and know you had done what you were called to do?

Our lives tend to be so scattered. We're intrigued by one trend only until the next comes along. Suckers for the latest craze or quick fix. This project, then another. Lives with no strategy, no goal, no defining priority. Playing the holes out of order. Erratic. Hesitant. Living life with the hiccups. We are easily distracted by the small things and forget the big things. I saw an example of this the other day in the grocery store.

There is one section in the supermarket where I am a seasoned veteran: the sample section. I'm never one to pass up a snack. Last Saturday I went to the back of the store where the samplers tend to linger. Bingo! There were two sample givers awaiting hungry sample takers. One had a skillet of sausage and the other a plate full of cream cheese covered celery. You'll be proud to know I opted for the celery. I wanted the sausage,

but I knew the celery was better for me.

Unfortunately, the celery lady never saw me. She was too busy straightening her sticks. I walked past her, and she never looked up. The sausage lady, however, saw me coming and extended the plate. I declined and made another circle past the celery lady. Same response. She never saw me. She was too busy getting her plate in order. So I made another loop past the sausage lady. Once again the offer came, and once again with admirable resolve I resisted. I was committed to doing the right thing.

So was the celery lady. She was determined to get every celery stick just so on her plate. But she cared more about the appearance of her product than the distribution. I stopped. I coughed. I cleared my throat. I did everything but sing a song. Still no response. The sausage lady, however, was waiting on me with sizzling sausage. I gave in; I ate the sausage.

The celery lady got off target. She was so occupied with the small matters (i.e., celery organization) that she forgot her assignment (i.e., to help needy, hungry, pitiful shoppers like me).

How do we keep from making the same mistake in life? God wants us to be just like Jesus and have focused hearts. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. How does God speak to us today?

7. What prevents us from hearing and obeying the Word of

God?

8. In what ways can we increase our openness to God's Word?
9. What good fruit is produced when we obey God's teaching?
10. How can the worries of life keep us from growing and producing fruit?
11. In what ways has God's Word changed your life?

LIFE LESSONS

We can use Jesus' parable of the soils to think of our life as a farm with fresh fields ready to plant. How receptive are we to God's Word? What will it grow in our lives? What fruit or harvest is being produced in our lives? If we can't identify any fruit, we may be resisting God's seed in us or we may not be able to see what he's doing. In either case, we can turn to God for help. And if we do see that God is working through us, we can take time to be humbly grateful. God enjoys hearing from thankful soil.

DEVOTION

We cherish the precious gift of your Word, Father. We praise you for providing a way to communicate with us. Give us ears to hear your voice and hearts willing to obey. Plant your good seed in our souls. May it dig deep into our lives and produce good fruit for your kingdom.

For more Bible passages on obeying the Bible, see Leviticus

18:4–5; 25:18; Deuteronomy 6:3; 13:4; 30:10; Joshua 22:5; 1 Kings 8:61; Psalm 119:1–40; Luke 11:28; John 14:23; Romans 2:13; 1 John 3:24; 2 John 1:6; Revelation 14:12.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 8:1–56.

JOURNALING

How can I become more like the good ground described in Jesus' parable?

LESSON SIX

BELIEVING
IN JESUS

**MAX
LUCADO**

REFLECTION

There are many opinions about who Jesus is, but a consensus is hard to find.

Maybe the differences in conclusions about Jesus' identity are more a reflection of the people commenting. How would your friends and coworkers answer the question, "Who is Jesus?"

SITUATION

Early in chapter 9 of Luke, Jesus sends out his disciples to "preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (9:2 NKJV). Later, the disciples returned to report on their efforts, and he took them aside for a rest. That break didn't last long, as they were interrupted by the crowds who followed. This led to the feeding of over five thousand people in the wilderness. Shortly after these events, Jesus' own quiet time of prayer led up to asking his disciples a disquieting question: What were people saying about him?

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 9:18–27 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹⁸One time when Jesus was praying alone, his followers were with him, and he asked them, “Who do the people say I am?”

¹⁹They answered, “Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Elijah. And others say you are one of the prophets from long ago who has come back to life.”

²⁰Then Jesus asked, “But who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ from God.”

²¹Jesus warned them not to tell anyone, saying, ²²“The Son of Man must suffer many things. He will be rejected by the older Jewish leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He will be killed and after three days will be raised from the dead.”

²³Jesus said to all of them, “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing to give up their lives daily to follow me. ²⁴Those who want to save their lives will give up true life. But those who give up their lives for me will have true life. ²⁵It is worth nothing for them to have the whole world if they themselves are destroyed or lost. ²⁶If people are ashamed of me and my teaching, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and with the glory of the Father and the holy angels. ²⁷I tell you the truth, some people standing here will see the kingdom of God before they die.”

NKJV

¹⁸And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”

¹⁹So they answered and said, “John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.”

²⁰He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.”

²¹And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²²saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”

²³Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. ²⁵For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? ²⁶For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels. ²⁷But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God.”

EXPLORATION

1. Why do you think Jesus posed probing questions to his

disciples about his identity?

2. What different views did people have about Jesus' identity?
3. Why did Jesus warn the disciples to keep his true identity a secret?
4. What kind of commitment does Jesus require from his followers?
5. List the rewards of sacrificing one's life to follow Jesus.

INSPIRATION

One of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament occurred in a city known as Caesarea Philippi. In the midst of this carnival of marble columns and golden idols, a penniless, homeless, nameless Nazarene asks his band of followers, "Who do you say that I am?"

The immensity of the question is staggering. I would imagine that Peter's answer did not come without some hesitation. Shuffling of feet. Anxious silence. How absurd that this man should be the Son of God. No trumpets. No purple robes. No armies. Yet there was that glint of determination in his eye and that edge of certainty in his message. Peter's response sliced the silence. "I believe that you are . . . the Son of God."

Many have looked at Jesus; but few have seen him. Many have seen his shadow, his people, his story. But only a handful have seen Jesus. Only a few have looked through the fog of religiosity and found him. Only a few have dared to stand eye-to-eye and heart to heart with Jesus and say, "I believe that you are the Son of God." (From *Shaped by God* by Max

Lucado)

REACTION

6. Why is Jesus' identity crucial to your faith?
7. How would you explain what you believe about Jesus to a person who has never heard his name?
8. Explain what it means to give up your life daily to follow Jesus.
9. What opportunities have you had to proclaim your faith in Jesus?
10. In what circumstances is it difficult for you to share your religious views?
11. In what way does this passage motivate you to speak out about your faith in Jesus Christ?

LIFE LESSONS

In today's world there's no shortage of ideas and opinions about Jesus. Ultimately, what matters in our relationship with Jesus is what *we* say about him. Saying nothing about him may be an option we take, but not one that expresses the kind of witness and honor Jesus deserves from those who claim to be his followers.

DEVOTION

Lord Jesus, we believe that you are the Son of God. We want to follow you, but sometimes we are scared of the risks and costs involved. But your Word teaches us that any sacrifice we make will be well worth the eternal reward. So we ask you to take our focus off of the things of this world and set our hopes on spending eternity with you.

For more Bible passages on believing in Jesus, see John 3:14–18; 4:42; 8:24; 9:35–38; 13:19–20; 16:30–31; 20:24–31; Acts 16:31; 19:4; Romans 3:22; 10:14; Philippians 1:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; 1 John 5:1–12.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 9:1–10:42.

JOURNALING

What things do I need to give up to follow Jesus wholeheartedly?

LESSON SEVEN

PERSISTENT PRAYER

MAX
LUCADO

REFLECTION

Prayer is one of the Christian's most amazing privileges. What a wonderful gift to be able to enter God's presence anytime, anywhere, and make our requests known. We've all seen answers to prayer. Yet most of us also have a backlog of requests that we've mentioned in prayer many times, with seemingly no answer in sight. Think of a time when you felt like giving up on a certain prayer request. What made it difficult to pray? What helped you keep on praying? What do you think would have happened if you stopped praying?

SITUATION

The disciples had numerous opportunities to observe Jesus as he prayed. Eventually, they got around to saying, "Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus' response shows that he heard two requests in one: the disciples needed some idea of *how* to pray and they also needed some idea of *why* they should pray. He gave them a model for how to approach God, and he also gave reasons why they should pray.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 11:1–13 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹One time Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his followers said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his followers.”

²Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say:

‘Father, may your name always be kept holy.

May your kingdom come.

³*Give us the food we need for each day.*

⁴*Forgive us for our sins, because we forgive everyone who has done wrong to us.*

And do not cause us to be tempted.’ ”

⁵Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose one of you went to your friend’s house at midnight and said to him, ‘Friend, loan me three loaves of bread. ⁶A friend of mine has come into town to visit me, but I have nothing for him to eat.’ ⁷Your friend inside the house answers, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸I tell you, if friendship is not enough to make him get up to give you the bread, your boldness will make him get up and give you whatever you need. ⁹So I tell you, ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you. ¹⁰Yes, everyone who asks will receive. The one who searches will find. And everyone who knocks will have the door opened. ¹¹If your children ask for a fish, which of you would give them a snake

instead?¹²Or, if your children ask for an egg, would you give them a scorpion?¹³Even though you are bad, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more your heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

NKJV

¹Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

²So He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.

³Give us day by day our daily bread.

⁴And forgive us our sins,

For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one."

⁵And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves;⁶for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him';⁷and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to

you'? ⁸"I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

⁹"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

EXPLORATION

1. Why do you think Jesus' habit of prayer sparked the disciples' interest in prayer?
2. List several common elements of prayer. Which seem crucial to you? Can you think of examples when a "prayer" wouldn't be a prayer?
3. In Jesus' story of the friend in need of bread, whom do the two friends represent?
4. What spiritual principles did Jesus convey to his disciples through his daily example and teaching?
5. Why is persistence in prayer important?

INSPIRATION

One of my favorite stories concerns a bishop who was traveling by ship to visit a church across the ocean. While en route, the ship stopped at an island for a day. He went for a walk on a beach. He came upon three fishermen mending their nets. . . .

When they found out he was a Christian leader, they got excited. “We Christians!” they said, proudly pointing to one another.

The bishop was impressed but cautious. Did they know the Lord’s Prayer? They had never heard of it.

“What do you say, then, when you pray?”

“We pray, ‘O we are three, You are three, have mercy on us.’”

The bishop was appalled at the primitive nature of the prayer. “That will not do.” So he spent the day teaching them the Lord’s Prayer. Before the bishop sailed away the next day, they could recite the prayer with no mistakes.

On the return trip the bishop’s ship drew near the island again . . . A light appeared on the horizon near the island. It seemed to be getting nearer. As the bishop gazed in wonder he realized the three fishermen were walking toward him on the water . . . When they were within speaking distance, the fisherman cried out, “Bishop, we are so sorry. We say, ‘O Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name . . . ’ and then we forget. Please tell us prayer again.”

The bishop was humbled. “Go back to your homes, my friends, and when you pray say, ‘O we are three, You are three, have

mercy on us.” (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

Reaction

6. In what way does the Lord's Prayer serve as a model for us to follow?
7. What are the dangers of reciting the same prayers over and over?
8. What steps can we take to keep our prayers honest and meaningful?
9. In what circumstances is it tempting to give up praying?
10. What can persistent prayer accomplish?
11. In what way does this passage change your attitude toward a long-term prayer request or need in your life?

LIFE LESSONS

Jesus practiced a habit of prayer. Like any good habit, it must be deliberately maintained or it will fade away. God's faithfulness is often demonstrated in the Holy Spirit's gentle nudging and reminders to pray. Satan's craftiness is often demonstrated in mocking us when we fail to pray. We are always better off dwelling on God's reminders to pray than listening to our enemy's attempts to humiliate and discourage us. Persistence in prayer means going on despite any barriers or excuses not to do so.

DEVOTION

Father, forgive us for giving up on prayer so easily. Forgive us for our insincerity and lack of interest. We thank you for remaining faithful to us, even when we are unfaithful. Teach us how to pray honestly, persistently, and faithfully. Most importantly, Father, help us to follow in the footsteps of your perfect Son, Jesus Christ.

For more Bible passages on prayer, see 1 Chronicles 5:20; Matthew 17:20; 21:21–22; Luke 17:6; 18:40–42; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; James 5:15–16; Jude 20.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 11:1–54.

JOURNALING

What is one principle I can apply from this passage to strengthen my prayer life?

LESSON EIGHT

TRUSTING GOD

MAX
LUCADO

REFLECTION

Sometimes we make life much harder than we need to make it. We rush around, working overtime to ensure that we have all the things we need and want. In a consumer-oriented society, Jesus' words about trusting God can easily be missed. But Jesus said that God will meet our needs. Think about a time when God met one of your needs in an unexpected or unusual way. How did you know it was God working?

SITUATION

We can think of few scenes in the Gospels where crowds were not present. People loved to hear Jesus teach, and this scene in Luke 12 is no different. Those who heard Jesus and believed in him were transformed from being outsiders to being insiders to the kingdom of God. We are very much like them. As we read, we also “listen in” to conversations Jesus had with his followers. Each time we do, we make some decisions about how we are going to accept Jesus' teaching. Listen in to this amazing teaching about lilies and birds and the kingdom.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 12:22–34 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

²²Jesus said to his followers, "So I tell you, don't worry about the food you need to live, or about the clothes you need for your body. ²³Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. ²⁴Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest, they don't have storerooms or barns, but God feeds them. And you are worth much more than birds. ²⁵You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it. ²⁶If you cannot do even the little things, then why worry about the big things? ²⁷Consider how the lilies grow; they don't work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that even Solomon with his riches was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. ²⁸God clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today but tomorrow is thrown into the fire. So how much more will God clothe you? Don't have so little faith! ²⁹Don't always think about what you will eat or what you will drink, and don't keep worrying. ³⁰All the people in the world are trying to get these things, and your Father knows you need them. ³¹But seek God's kingdom, and all the other things you need will be given to you.

³²"Don't fear, little flock, because your Father wants to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Get for yourselves purses that will not wear out, the treasure in heaven that never runs out, where thieves can't steal and moths can't destroy. ³⁴Your heart will be where your

treasure is.”

NKJV

²²Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. ²³Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? ²⁵And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁶If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?

²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?

²⁹“And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. ³⁰For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

³²“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

³³Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

EXPLORATION

1. Why should believers trust God, instead of worrying?
2. Jesus gave two examples from nature about trusting God: sparrows and lilies. Can you think of any others?
3. Explain how worry demonstrates a lack of faith.
4. What are the rewards of seeking God’s kingdom, instead of personal gain?
5. How do earthly riches differ from heavenly treasure?

INSPIRATION

Do you really want the world to revolve around you? If it’s all about you, then it’s all up to you. Your Father rescues you from such a burden. While you are valuable, you aren’t essential. You’re important but not indispensable. Still don’t think that’s good news?

Perhaps a story would be helpful. My father, an oil-field mechanic, never met a car he couldn’t fix. Forget golf clubs or tennis rackets, my dad’s toys were sockets and wrenches. He relished a wrecked engine . . . Dad did with a V-8 engine what

Patton did with a platoon—he made it work.

Oh that the same could be said for his youngest son. It can't. My problem with mechanics begins with the ends of the car. I can't remember which one holds the engine. Anyone who confuses the spare tire with the fan belt is likely not gifted in car repair.

My ignorance left my dad in a precarious position. What does a skilled mechanic do with a son who is anything but? As you begin formulating an answer, may I ask this question: What does God do with us? Under his care the universe runs like a Rolex. But his children? Most of us have trouble balancing a checkbook. So what does he do?

I know what my dad did. Much to his credit, he let me help him. He gave me jobs to do—holding wrenches, scrubbing spark plugs. And he knew my limits.

Never once did he say, “Max, tear apart that transmission, will you? One of the gears is broken.” Never said it. For one thing, he liked his transmission. For another, he loved me. He loved me too much to give me too much.

So does God. He knows your limitations. He's well aware of your weaknesses. You can no more die for your own sins than you can solve world hunger. And, according to him, that's okay. The world doesn't rely on you . . . We don't know what it takes to run the world, and wise are we who leave the work to his hands. To say “It's not about you” is not to say you aren't loved; quite the contrary. It's because God loves you that it's not about you. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. What is the secret of contentment?
7. List some of the consequences of anxiety.
8. What simple steps can believers take to avoid worry?
9. What is the difference between planning ahead and worrying?
10. How does this passage inspire you to trust God with your needs?
11. In what concrete ways can we demonstrate our trust in God's provision?

LIFE LESSONS

This passage contains two valuable examples from which we can learn: birds and lilies. Looking at birds flit around, pecking out their daily survival, we are reminded of the countless details we seek out each day for our survival, that God provides, things we often take for granted. As we consider the lilies, we notice that rather than flying around and working to have their needs met, they sit still, soaking in what God sends. Lilies remind us of all the added benefits that God brings into our lives. Far more than the mere basics, God pours out blessings uncounted on our heads. Somewhere between bird-watching and the lily-considering, our worries disappear.

DEVOTION

Father, your Word promises that you will protect and provide for your people. Forgive us for choosing to worry instead of depending on you. Help us see the futility of worry and the benefits of trusting you. Calm our fears and fill us with faith so we can focus our attention and energy on seeking your kingdom.

For more Bible passages on trusting God, see Psalms 4:5; 20:7; 22:9–10; 37:3–5; 40:3–4; 56:3–11; 115:9–11; 125:1; Isaiah 26:4; Jeremiah 17:5–8; Daniel 6:23; Nahum 1:7; Zephaniah 3:12; John 14:1; Romans 9:33.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 12:1–14:35.

JOURNALING

When is it most difficult for me to trust God? Why?

LESSON NINE

GOD'S LOVE
FOR PEOPLE

**MAX
LUCADO**

REFLECTION

At some point in life, God's love must move from being a concept we wonder about to a conscious experience that transforms our lives. God's love deserves better than a half-hearted acknowledgment. It keeps coming even when we have covered our shame and disappointment with a veneer of carefree rejection that barely hides the terror within. Somewhere and somehow God's love will move us, but will we go along? In what tangible ways have you already felt God's love for you?

SITUATION

Since the start of his ministry, Jesus was traveling resolutely toward Jerusalem. The showdown with the Jewish religious leaders was coming. As he traveled, Jesus continued to teach and heal. Desperate people came to him, and he welcomed them, much to the dismay and anger of his enemies. Instead of arguing directly with his opponents or pointing out their hypocrisy in plain language, Jesus resorted to parables. The stories contained a barb of truth that prodded the deceitful even while they communicated God's great love for sinners.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 15:11–32 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹¹Then Jesus said, "A man had two sons. ¹²The younger son said to his father, 'Give me my share of the property.' So the father divided the property between his two sons. ¹³Then the younger son gathered up all that was his and traveled far away to another country. There he wasted his money in foolish living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, a time came when there was no food anywhere in the country, and the son was poor and hungry. ¹⁵So he got a job with one of the citizens there who sent the son into the fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷When he realized what he was doing, he thought, 'All of my father's servants have plenty of food. But I am here, almost dying with hunger. ¹⁸I will leave and return to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against God and have done wrong to you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son, but let me be like one of your servants." ²⁰So the son left and went to his father. "While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for his son. So the father ran to him and hugged and kissed him. ²¹The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against God and have done wrong to you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. ²²But the father said to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring the best clothes and put them on him. Also, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get our fat calf

and kill it so we can have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴*My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found!’ So they began to celebrate.*

²⁵*“The older son was in the field, and as he came closer to the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.* ²⁶*So he called to one of the servants and asked what all this meant.*

²⁷*The servant said, ‘Your brother has come back, and your father killed the fat calf, because your brother came home safely.’* ²⁸*The older son was angry and would not go in to the feast. So his father went out and begged him to come in.* ²⁹*But the older son said to his father, ‘I have served you like a slave for many years and have always obeyed your commands. But you never gave me even a young goat to have at a feast with my friends.*

³⁰*But your other son, who wasted all your money on prostitutes, comes home, and you kill the fat calf for him!’*

³¹*The father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.* ³²*We had to celebrate and be happy because your brother was dead, but now he is alive. He was lost, but now he is found.’ ”*

NKJV

¹¹*Then He said: “A certain man had two sons.* ¹²*And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his*

livelihood.¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!’¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,’¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”

²⁰“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;’²⁴ ‘for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

²⁵“Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.²⁶ So he

called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.
²⁷And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

²⁸"But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

³¹"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³²It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"

EXPLORATION

1. Name some of God's character traits highlighted in the parable of the prodigal son.
2. What happens when God gives people freedom to make their own choices?
3. In what ways do we sometimes show disregard for God's authority, like the younger son in the story?
4. Why do hard times often bring people to repentance?
5. In what way does God respond to people who confess their

sins and return to him?

INSPIRATION

Captured in the portrait is a tender scene of a father and a son. Behind them is a great house on a hill. Beneath their feet is a narrow path. Down from the house the father has run. Up the trail the son has trudged. The two have met, here, at the gate.

We can't see the face of the son; it's buried in the chest of his father. We can see the mud on the back of his legs, the filth on his shoulders and the empty purse on the ground. At one time the purse was full of money. At one time the boy was full of pride. But that was a dozen taverns ago. Now both the purse and the pride are depleted. The prodigal offers no gift or explanation. All he offers is the smell of pigs and a rehearsed apology. He feels unworthy of his birthright . . . The boy is content to be a hired hand. There is only one problem. Though the boy is willing to stop being a son, the father is not willing to stop being a father.

Look at the tears glistening on the [father's] leathered cheeks, the smile shining through the silver beard. One arm holds the boy up so he won't fall, the other holds the boy close so he won't doubt.

"Hurry!" he shouts. "Bring the best clothes and put them on him. Also, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get our fat calf and kill it so we can have a feast and celebrate. My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost but now he is found!" (Luke 15:22–24 NCV).

How these words must have stunned the young man, “*My son was dead . . .*” He thought he’d lost his place in the home. After all, didn’t he abandon his father? Didn’t he waste his inheritance? The boy assumed he had forfeited his privilege to sonship. The father, however, doesn’t give up that easily. In his mind, his son is still a son. The child may have been out of the house, but he was never out of his father’s heart. He may have left the table, but he never left the family.

Don’t miss the message here. You may be willing to stop being God’s child. But God is not willing to stop being your Father. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. Why does God accept and forgive sinful people?
7. Why is it important to realize that God values all people equally?
8. How does it feel to know that God sees all of your faults and still loves you?
9. Why do we tend to treat some people better than others?
10. In what ways can we combat our tendency to withhold love from certain people?
11. Think of one person who is difficult to love. In what ways can you show God’s love to that person?

LIFE LESSONS

Parent, sibling, and wayward child—all of us relate in one way or another to the story Jesus told. Often we can play more than one part. But each of the parts allows us to learn something about love. God designed relationships in such a way that every one in which we share a part becomes an opportunity to love and be loved. Others may disappoint us, and we will probably disappoint others. Only God loves perfectly. But he helps us love better than we could possibly accomplish in our own strength. In fact, “We love because God first loved us” (1 John 4:19 NCV).

DEVOTION

We stand in awe, Father, of your great love—love so deep that you sacrificed your only Son to save sinful people. Forgive us for our rebellion and disobedience. Give us the strength to turn away from our sin and accept your forgiveness. And we ask you, Father, to help us see others through your loving eyes.

For more Bible passages on God’s love for us, see Deuteronomy 7:8; Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4–5; 1 John 3:1; 4:7–21.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 15:1–18:43.

JOURNALING

How can I thank God for treating me better than I deserve?

LESSON TEN

TRUE WORSHIP

MAX
LUCADO

REFLECTION

When celebrities arrive at a gala event, they are greeted with applause, red carpet treatment, and a dizzying barrage of camera flashes. On more formal occasions, the chaos is replaced with hushed tones and whispered comments. When someone important arrives on the scene, others pay attention. If Jesus were to visit your church, how do you think he would be greeted? Do you think he would feel comfortable? Would he be noticed? Explain.

SITUATION

Countless people were making their way into David's city, Jerusalem, for the yearly celebration of the Passover. In a symbolic gesture, Jesus rode a colt into town, reenacting an ancient tradition of a king coming in peace. He was greeted with praise and palm branches. But as the week unfolded, it quickly became apparent that some people had an agenda of their own. They expected Jesus to become a militant king and save them from Rome, but Jesus had a much greater purpose in mind.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 19:28–48 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

²⁸After Jesus said this, he went on toward Jerusalem. ²⁹As Jesus came near Bethphage and Bethany, towns near the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent out two of his followers.

³⁰He said, "Go to the town you can see there. When you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here to me. ³¹If anyone asks you why you are untying it, say that the Master needs it."

³²The two followers went into town and found the colt just as Jesus had told them. ³³As they were untying it, its owners came out and asked the followers, "Why are you untying our colt?"

³⁴The followers answered, "The Master needs it." ³⁵So they brought it to Jesus, threw their coats on the colt's back, and put Jesus on it. ³⁶As Jesus rode toward Jerusalem, others spread their coats on the road before him.

³⁷As he was coming close to Jerusalem, on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of followers began joyfully shouting praise to God for all the miracles they had seen.

³⁸They said,

"God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

There is peace in heaven and glory to God!"

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell your followers not to say these things."

⁴⁰But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if my followers didn't say

these things, then the stones would cry out.”

⁴¹As Jesus came near Jerusalem, he saw the city and cried for it, ⁴²saying, “I wish you knew today what would bring you peace. But now it is hidden from you. ⁴³The time is coming when your enemies will build a wall around you and will hold you in on all sides. ⁴⁴They will destroy you and all your people, and not one stone will be left on another. All this will happen because you did not recognize the time when God came to save you.”

⁴⁵Jesus went into the Temple and began to throw out the people who were selling things there. ⁴⁶He said, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘My Temple will be a house for prayer.’ But you have changed it into a ‘hideout for robbers!’”

⁴⁷Jesus taught in the Temple every day. The leading priests, the experts on the law, and some of the leaders of the people wanted to kill Jesus. ⁴⁸But they did not know how they could do it, because all the people were listening closely to him.

NKJV

²⁸When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹And it came to pass, when He came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, that He sent two of His disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village opposite you, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring it here. ³¹And if

anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing it?' thus you shall say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.' "

³²So those who were sent went their way and found it just as He had said to them.³³But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?"

³⁴And they said, "The Lord has need of him."³⁵Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him.³⁶And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road.

³⁷Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen,³⁸saying:

"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."

⁴⁰But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

⁴¹Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,⁴²saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.⁴³For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,⁴⁴and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will

not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

⁴⁵Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, ⁴⁶saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

⁴⁷And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, ⁴⁸and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

EXPLORATION

1. Why did the people celebrate Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem?
2. Why did Jesus weep when he saw Jerusalem while all the people were praising him?
3. List some reasons Jesus would not tolerate the buying and selling in the temple.
4. Jesus called the temple “a house of prayer.” How well does that describe our churches today?
5. What message did Jesus send to church leaders when he cleared the temple?

INSPIRATION

It's a sad but true fact of the faith: religion is used for profit and prestige. When it is, there are two results: people are exploited and God is infuriated. There's no better example of this than what happened at the temple . . . What did [Jesus] see? Hucksters. Faith peddlers. People in the temple making a franchise out of the faith.

It was Passover week. The Passover was the highlight of the Jewish calendar. People came from all regions and many countries to be present for the celebration. Upon arriving they were obligated to meet two requirements. First, an animal sacrifice, usually a dove. The dove had to be perfect, without blemish . . . So, under the guise of keeping the sacrifice pure, the dove sellers sold doves—at their price. Second, the people had to pay a temple tax . . . in local currency. Knowing many foreigners would be in Jerusalem to pay the tax, money changers conveniently set up tables and offered to exchange the foreign money for local—for a modest fee, of course.

It's not difficult to see what angered Jesus. Pilgrims journeyed days to see God, to witness the holy, to worship His Majesty. But before they were taken into the presence of God, they were taken to the cleaners . . .

“I've had enough,” was written all over the Messiah's face. In he stormed. Doves flapped and tables flew. People scampered and traders scattered. This was not an impulsive show. This was not a temper tantrum. It was a deliberate act with an intentional message . . . Knowing his days were drawing to a close, he chose to make a point: God will never hold guiltless those who exploit the privilege of worship. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. How would you define true worship?
7. List some things that can interfere with our worship.
8. In what ways can we determine whether our motives are pure when we go to church?
9. List some ways you have seen someone misuse religion for his or her own purposes.
10. What responsibility do we have to eliminate inappropriate activities and behavior from the church?
11. What steps can believers take to protect the church from exploitation?

LIFE LESSONS

Worship takes on a very different tone when we stop long enough to remember that Jesus sees more than external actions. Watching us go through the motions may impress others and satisfy our own ideas of what “minimum worship requirements” entail. But God sees our hearts, our intentions, the flow of our thoughts. Although much attention is given to worship styles: contemporary versus traditional, spontaneous versus liturgical, all these concerns pale before the ultimate issue of what God witnesses when we worship. We’ve got God’s attention when we enter worship. What will we do with it?

DEVOTION

Father, forgive us for our insincerity and dishonesty. We want to learn how to worship you in spirit and in truth. We need you, Father, to help us witness your holiness, bask in your glory, and feel your presence. May we truly be thankful for the privilege of worshipping you.

For more Bible passages on worship, see Joshua 22:27; 1 Chronicles 16:28–29; 2 Chronicles 29:30; Psalm 95:6; Zechariah 14:17; Matthew 2:2; 28:9; John 4:24; Romans 12:1.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 19:1–20:47.

JOURNALING

In light of this passage, what changes do I need to make in the way that I approach worship?

LESSON ELEVEN

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

MAX
LUCADO

REFLECTION

A sacrifice should be just that—a sacrifice. Sacrifices may be inconvenient and are costly. By definition, a sacrifice almost always involves some kind of death or loss. Think of a time when you gave something up for a friend. In what way did your sacrifice help that person?

SITUATION

Jesus' sham trials are over. The verdict has been passed. The accused makes his way to the place of execution. Last-minute details take on extraordinary weight—a passerby recruited to help carry the cross, women watching and weeping, two other death-row criminals almost forgotten in the crowd, and a mocking sign—all these create a haunting scene of sacrifice. As you revisit this scene, what will you learn from the cross of Jesus Christ?

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 23:26–49 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

²⁶*As they led Jesus away, Simon, a man from Cyrene, was*

coming in from the fields. They forced him to carry Jesus' cross and to walk behind him.

²⁷A large crowd of people was following Jesus, including some women who were sad and crying for him. ²⁸But Jesus turned and said to them, "Women of Jerusalem, don't cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹The time is coming when people will say, 'Happy are the women who cannot have children and who have no babies to nurse.'

³⁰Then people will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' And they will say to the hills, 'Cover us!' ³¹If they act like this now when life is good, what will happen when bad times come?"

³²There were also two criminals led out with Jesus to be put to death. ³³When they came to a place called the Skull, the soldiers crucified Jesus and the criminals—one on his right and the other on his left. ³⁴Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing."

The soldiers threw lots to decide who would get his clothes.

³⁵The people stood there watching. And the leaders made fun of Jesus, saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself if he is God's Chosen One, the Christ."

³⁶The soldiers also made fun of him, coming to Jesus and offering him some vinegar.

³⁷They said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸At the top of the cross these words were written: this is the king of the jews.

³⁹One of the criminals on a cross began to shout insults at

Jesus: "Aren't you the Christ? Then save yourself and us."

⁴⁰But the other criminal stopped him and said, "You should fear God! You are getting the same punishment he is. ⁴¹We are punished justly, getting what we deserve for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong."⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³Jesus said to him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

⁴⁴It was about noon, and the whole land became dark until three o'clock in the afternoon, ⁴⁵because the sun did not shine. The curtain in the Temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, I give you my life." After Jesus said this, he died.

⁴⁷When the army officer there saw what happened, he praised God, saying, "Surely this was a good man!"

⁴⁸When all the people who had gathered there to watch saw what happened, they returned home, beating their chests because they were so sad. ⁴⁹But those who were close friends of Jesus, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance and watched.

NKJV

²⁶Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.

²⁷And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. ²⁸But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' ³⁰Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' ³¹For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

³²There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. ³³And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

And they divided His garments and cast lots. ³⁵And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."

³⁶The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."

³⁸And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew:

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed

Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

⁴⁰But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?

⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

⁴³And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

⁴⁴Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. ⁴⁵Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two.

⁴⁶And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

⁴⁷So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"

⁴⁸And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.

⁴⁹But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

EXPLORATION

1. Why was Jesus' sacrifice necessary to restore the relationship between God and man?

2. What character traits did Jesus exhibit during the hours before his death?
3. In what ways should believers try to imitate Christ's attitude of forgiveness?
4. What was the significance of the torn curtain in the temple leading into the Holy of Holies at the time of Christ's death?
5. Why did Jesus submit to God's plan of salvation for the world?

INSPIRATION

The King looked at the Prince of Light. "The darkness will be great." He passed his hand over the spotless face of his Son. "The pain will be awful." Then he paused and looked at his darkened dominion. When he looked up, his eyes were moist. "But there is no other way."

The Son looked into the stars as he heard the answer. "Then, let it be done."

Slowly the words that would kill the Son began to come from the lips of the Father.

"Hour of death, moment of sacrifice, it is your moment. Rehearsed a million times on false altars with false lambs; the moment of truth has come. . . .

"Oh, my Son, my Child. Look up into the heavens and see my face before I turn it. Hear my voice before I silence it. Would that I could save you and them. But they don't see and they don't hear.

"The living must die so that the dying can live. The time has

come to kill the Lamb.” . . .

God must have wept as he performed his task. Every lie, every lure, every act done in shadows was in that cup. Slowly, hideously they were absorbed into the body of the Son. The final act of incarnation. . . .

The throne room is dark and cavernous. The eyes of the King are closed. He is resting.

In his dream he is again in the Garden. The cool of the evening floats across the river as the three walk. They speak of the Garden—of how it is, of how it will be.

“Father . . .” the Son begins. The King replays the word again. Father. Father. The word was a flower, petal-delicate, yet so easily crushed. Oh, how he longed for his children to call him Father again.

A noise snaps him from his dream. He opens his eyes and sees a transcendent figure gleaming in the doorway. “It is finished, Father. I have come home.” (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. Explain the significance of Jesus’ death on the cross.
7. Why is it important to accept Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf?
8. For what reasons do people refuse God’s gift of salvation?
9. How would our lives be different if Jesus had never died and risen again?
10. How do you feel when you think about the pain and

anguish Jesus endured for you?

11. Who is one person you can tell about Christ's work on the cross?

LIFE LESSON

The rest of the Gospel accounts make it clear that Jesus went to the cross willingly. He died neither because others were stronger than he was nor because he deserved the treatment he received. He had a reason for surrendering his life well beyond the immediate circumstances. His prayer from the cross for his executioners to be forgiven ought to pluck a chord in us—for as sinners we share in the cause of his death. His promise of paradise to the repentant criminal ought to cause our hearts to leap and our lips to whisper, “Me too, Lord!” Does it? Personally owning Christ's death is the most valuable life lesson we could ever learn. Not only is it priceless; it is also eternal.

DEVOTION

Lord, you were willing to suffer pain, ridicule, and even death for us. How can we ever thank you? All we can offer you is our hearts and lives. Help us to love and obey you until we meet face-to-face in heaven. And while we wait for that day, use us to bring others into a right relationship with you.

For more Bible passages on Jesus' sacrifice, see Romans 3:23–26; 8:32; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 1:3–4; 2:20; Ephesians 5:2;

1 Timothy 2:5–6; Titus 2:12–14; Hebrews 7:27; 9:23–28; 10:9–18; 1 John 2:1–2; 4:10.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 21:1– 23:56.

JOURNALING

How can I show my appreciation for what Jesus has done for me?

LESSON TWELVE

SEEING JESUS

MAX
LUCADO

REFLECTION

If you know Jesus personally, someone probably introduced him to you. Perhaps many people were involved in your coming to faith. Take a few minutes to think about the people through whom God worked to communicate his message of love to you. Who helped you understand your need for a relationship with Jesus?

SITUATION

The news of Jesus' resurrection spread like wild fire, though his followers had a hard time believing it. Two believers left Jerusalem and headed to Emmaus. As they walked and talked, they were joined by another man—a man who asked interesting questions and seemed curiously ignorant of the recent events in Jerusalem. The two travelers were amazed at how much the stranger knew about Jesus and about the ancient Scriptures. His companionship was so warm that they couldn't resist inviting him to stay with them for the evening. That's when their eyes were really opened.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 24:13–35 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

¹³That same day two of Jesus' followers were going to a town named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking about everything that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and began walking with them, ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷Then he said, "What are these things you are talking about while you walk?"

The two followers stopped, looking very sad. ¹⁸The one named Cleopas answered, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know what just happened there?"

¹⁹Jesus said to them, "What are you talking about?"

They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet who said and did many powerful things before God and all the people. ²⁰Our leaders and the leading priests handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him.

²¹But we were hoping that he would free Israel. Besides this, it is now the third day since this happened. ²²And today some women among us amazed us. Early this morning they went to the tomb, ²³but they did not find his body there. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said that Jesus was alive! ²⁴So some of our group went to the tomb, too. They found it just as the women said, but they did not see Jesus."

²⁵Then Jesus said to them, "You are foolish and slow to

believe everything the prophets said.²⁶They said that the Christ must suffer these things before he enters his glory.”

²⁷Then starting with what Moses and all the prophets had said about him, Jesus began to explain everything that had been written about himself in the Scriptures.

²⁸They came near the town of Emmaus, and Jesus acted as if he were going farther.²⁹But they begged him, “Stay with us, because it is late; it is almost night.” So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When Jesus was at the table with them, he took some bread, gave thanks, divided it, and gave it to them.³¹And then, they were allowed to recognize Jesus. But when they saw who he was, he disappeared.³²They said to each other; “It felt like a fire burning in us when Jesus talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us.”

³³So the two followers got up at once and went back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven apostles and others gathered.³⁴They were saying, “The Lord really has risen from the dead! He showed himself to Simon.”

³⁵Then the two followers told what had happened on the road and how they recognized Jesus when he divided the bread.

NKJV

¹³Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from

Jerusalem.¹⁴ And they talked together of all these things which had happened.¹⁵ So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.¹⁶ But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

¹⁷ And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"

¹⁸ Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"¹⁹ And He said to them, "What things?"

So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,²⁰ and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.²¹ But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.²² Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us.

²³ When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.²⁴ And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

²⁵ Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!²⁶ Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His

glory?”²⁷ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

²⁸Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. ²⁹But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.

³⁰Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

³¹Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

³²And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”³³ So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴saying, “The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”

³⁵And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

EXPLORATION

1. List some common misconceptions about Jesus and his ministry.

2. What prevents people from recognizing and accepting Jesus as Savior?
3. In what different ways does Jesus reveal himself to people?
4. Why did Jesus make himself known to some people and not to others?
5. What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us see Jesus?

INSPIRATION

Jesus. Have you seen him? Those who first did were never the same.

“My Lord and my God!” cried Thomas.

“I have seen the Lord,” exclaimed Mary Magdalene.

“We have seen his glory,” declared John.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked?” rejoiced the two Emmaus-bound disciples.

But Peter said it best. “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

His Majesty. The emperor of Judah. The soaring eagle of eternity. The noble admiral of the Kingdom. All the splendor of heaven revealed in a human body. For a period ever so brief, the doors to the throne room were open and God came near. His Majesty was seen. Heaven touched the earth and, as a result, earth can know heaven. In astounding tandem a human body housed divinity.

Holiness and earthliness intertwined.

This is no run-of-the-mill messiah. His story was extraordinary. He called himself divine, yet allowed a minimum-wage Roman

soldier to drive a nail into his wrist. He demanded purity, yet stood for the rights of a repentant whore. He called men to march, yet refused to allow them to call him King. He sent men into all the world, yet equipped them with only bended knees and memories of a resurrected carpenter.

We can't regard him as simply a good teacher. His claims are too outrageous to limit him to the company of Socrates or Aristotle. Nor can we categorize him as one of many prophets sent to reveal eternal truths. His own claims eliminate that possibility.

Has it been a while since you have seen him? If your prayers seem stale, it probably has. If your faith seems to be trembling, perhaps your vision of him has blurred. If you can't find power to face your problems, perhaps it is time to face him. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

6. In what way can meeting Jesus change a person's life?
7. Describe your first encounter with Jesus.
8. In what ways has your relationship with Jesus Christ grown and matured?
9. In what ways can life's problems and disappointments interfere with our communion with God?
10. What can believers do when God seems far away?
11. What steps can you take to nurture your relationship with Jesus?

LIFE LESSONS

Perhaps this study has turned into a “road to Emmaus” lesson for you. You thought you knew Jesus, but you’ve discovered there’s a lot more to him than you realized. Only you can tell if this was the beginning of a relationship or the deepening of one. But you can be sure of this, that even as Jesus made himself unexpectedly available and known to those disciples on the road, he will do the same for you. At times when you least expect him, he will show up and make a difference. Live your life *for* him and you will be delighted how often you notice you’re living *with* him.

DEVOTION

Father, thank you for sending your Son to free us from the penalty of sin. Thank you that he rose from the dead and lives today. And thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit to help us recognize and accept Jesus as our Savior. Guide us into a deeper relationship with you, so that when we go through difficult times, we can run to you and rest secure in your presence. Thank you for showing up on our road of life, too.

For more Bible passages on knowing Jesus, see John 10:14–27; Ephesians 1:15–17; Philippians 3:8–10; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 John 2:3–6, 29; 3:1–3; 4:13–16.

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 24:1–53.

JOURNALING

How has meeting Jesus impacted my life?



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