

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

WELCOME TO A NEW PART OF YOUR STUDY



In this unit you encounter mission through the eyes of the writer of Luke/Acts. To understand Luke's gospel the reader must look back and look forward; for Luke looks back to the prophets of Israel and looks forward to the Acts of God's Spirit through the church. As does each of the gospel writers, Luke emphasizes the importance of serving others in the name of Jesus. However, more than any gospel, Luke takes a further step by drawing from the prophets, to go beyond service to advocating on behalf of those we serve, especially the poor and the marginalized. Followers of Jesus are asked by Luke to go and to bring God's mission of justice into the world they live in and beyond. Luke, more than the other writers, calls for justice in the world; the same kind of justice spoken of by the prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah. But unlike the Old Covenant hope, God's justice is now for the poor and the oppressed in all nations. And the mission of God's justice comes without retribution; which raises the question, "What does justice look like without retribution for Luke's faith-community and for us today?"

Luke will challenge us to go beyond "serving" those in need, to advocating on behalf of those we serve. Luke will also challenge us to go beyond any preconceived borders or boundaries when doing so. Here's a brief overview of the sessions that are a part of this unit. Enjoy learning from Luke, your mission instructor for these five sessions.

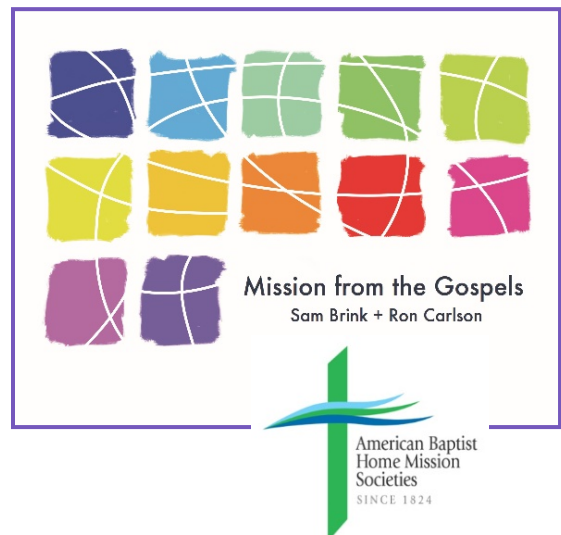
Week One: Have a Merry Missional Christmas For many, Luke is the beloved gospel because it contains the Christmas story – the angels and shepherds, sheep on the hill on a starry night and of course a baby in a manger. So we begin our look at Luke by playing with the Christmas story; because regardless of how we have created it in our mind, the story of Christmas is steeped in justice issues - issues that may and can become difficult for people to honestly address.

Week Two: Looking Back and Looking Forward This week's lesson addresses one of the assumptions behind our approach to learning mission from Luke's Gospel: that to understand Luke, one needs to think about the prophetic ministry, especially that of Isaiah. The justice in Israel hoped for by the prophets, in Luke's Gospel becomes the justice hoped for by Jesus for the entire world.

Week Three: God's Spirit, Prayer and Mission In both Luke's Gospel and Luke's Acts of the Apostles, it is apparent that participation in God's mission in the world can be overwhelming. For this reason, Luke focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of prayer for any faith-community that seeks to follow Jesus into the mission field of their neighboring communities and beyond.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

Week Four: Called to Go! Followers of Jesus are asked by Luke to go and to bring God's mission of justice into the world they live in and beyond. In this week's study, you will find four different times that Luke shared where Jesus called his followers into mission. The purpose of this week's reflection is to help your study group consider the expanding scope of your missional journey.



UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

Week One: Have a Merry Missional Christmas



Welcome to this part of the journey!

This week we are going to look at a familiar Christmas story through the lens of mission. Luke evidently had more in mind for the church than creating children's Christmas pageants complete with cardboard angel wings and bathrobe shepherd costumes! When Luke introduces his gospel with the nativity, he has the nature of God's mission in mind!



Begin class with prayer

Ask someone to read Luke 1:46-55 (the Magnificat passage of Mary's prayer). Listen carefully to the passage and think of the Advent season as it is read. Refrain from making any comments on the reading of this passage.

After the reading, spend time in prayer as a group. During your prayer time ask God to help you to make new discoveries about God's mission from the Christmas story in Luke.



Let's investigate

Regardless of the time of year, the stories of Christmas can bring a flood of childhood memories to our minds. Turn to a couple of people in your class (about three to a small group) and share your answers to the following:

- If as a child you celebrated Christmas, share one of your most memorable Christmas experiences.
- If not, how did it feel to hear and see others celebrating this holiday?

A WELL INTENTIONED CONFERENCE WITH AN UNINTENDED RESPONSE

On the following pages you will find a brief narrative (case study) about a carefully planned mission conference. You may choose to read the following account individually in silence or have someone, who is willing, read the story to the group. Listen closely to the details but also be aware of your own reactions to the following narrative.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

A WELL INTENTIONED CONFERENCE WITH AN UNINTENDED RESPONSE

The beginning of the Christmas Advent season seemed like the perfect time for the Biennial Conference on Biblical Justice. The planning team for the interdenominational conference worked diligently for two years, making sure that this year's biennial conference theme, "Prophetic Justice in Words and Deed" ran true throughout every large-group assembly, in each break-out session and workshop. Particular care was taken to include and "give voice to" representatives of the diverse cultural, ethnic and socio-economic people groups who were invited to attend. Speakers and workshop leaders (all of whom were highly regarded across multid denominational lines) were carefully chosen to represent American diversity. The conference site was likewise judiciously selected; it was to be held in a hotel conference center located near the airport of a large Midwestern city. The conference center, complete with multiple restaurants, shops and various forms of entertainment, specialized in hosting large gatherings located on the outskirts of the metropolitan center; special arrangements were made to provide tours to the inner-city and to the area's tourist attractions. Knowing that a number of the invited guests could not afford to attend, numerous grants and scholarships were provided by gracious donors, both individuals and corporations. The phrase, "We need to be careful not to exclude people from a conference on Biblical justice because of the cost of the event." was often repeated by members of the planning team and served as the basis for the event's fund-raising appeal.

Outside of a few last minute organizational glitches, the well-attended three day conference was "successfully" launched. The keynote speaker as well as others who addressed the large assemblies, all focused on Biblical and theological foundations for prophetic justice in the 21st century. Workshops and break-out sessions, on the other hand, focused on the pragmatics of speaking a prophetic voice and acting prophetically in response to a variety of long-standing and emerging social needs and justice issues. Several workshops focused on matters related to immigration reform and refugee resettlement. The influx of undocumented refugees from Central America as well as responses to displaced persons from Syria and the Middle East took "center stage" in these break-out presentations and conversations. Following a panel discussion on "Speaking Prophetically on Behalf of the Voiceless Immigrant," the microphones were open to questions and comments from the audience. Several participants shared how they used the Christmas Advent season to preach prophetically to their congregations about advocating on behalf of displaced persons and those "fleeing modern day Harrods." They admitted that they were receiving criticism and pushback from church members who "did not appreciate using the pulpit to promote controversial political positions, especially at Christmastime." Others asked questions or gave advice about how to handle conflict in congregations that were politically divided over issues of immigration reform and opening our borders to displaced people from Islamic countries. The panel of experts seemed well-equipped to handle these questions and to give advice on handling congregational pushback and opposition. "How to keep peace in the congregation when preaching prophetically?" seemed to be the dominant question addressed to the panel.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

But the spirit of the conversation took an unexpected turn when a soft-spoken elderly man came to the microphone. In a deep Hispanic accent he said, "I want to thank everyone here for what you have been saying. I hope no one will think I am ungrateful. But my heart is broken and I cannot keep silent. This entire conference has focused on the prophetic voice and the prophetic actions of the church. That is good. And this workshop has a panel of speakers and preachers who know how to preach prophetically. But I am afraid to say what is on my heart because I am a pastor of a church of those you call 'the voiceless immigrant.' I am a legal immigrant, but most of my congregation is not. Even those who have a Green Card or citizenship are mostly poor. Yet, these people have opened their homes to house families and even children without parents who have fled the gang violence of Central America and Mexico. Even though they have low incomes and most work for less than minimum wage, most in my congregation are supporting families still back in the countries which they themselves fled. They take what little they have and share – no – they give it away."

At this point, the elderly man broke into tears. Attempting to recompose himself he continued. "Please, don't think I am ungrateful. My way to this conference was paid for and so was my lodging. You have been generous. But I find it hard to accept that a conference such as this, a conference on speaking and acting prophetically, doesn't hear the real voice of the voiceless. The cost of my room for one night, which someone has paid, is greater than a week's pay for some of my church people. What I am spending on food in these nice restaurants could feed their families back home for months, even for a year or more, and I am skipping meals and ordering the lowest cost things on the menus! You have attempted to include people of diversity, but my people are afraid to be represented here or anywhere because if they are discovered they not only will have no voice, they will have no future for themselves, their children or their families still back in their countries. Some of your congregations are afraid of church conflict because you are "preaching prophetically." My people are afraid of the INS, deportation, separation from their children and facing gang violence resulting in death if they are returned to their country. Again, my apologies, but I really expected more advice on how as a pastor, I can speak and act more prophetically on behalf of my people. I was hoping to go back to my church and tell my people how you here are going to speak and act on their behalf."

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL



Let's talk about it: Discussing Mary's Song and A Well-Intentioned Conference with an Unintended Response

At the start of this lesson someone read Luke 1:46-55. Often referred to as "Mary's Song" or the "Magnificat," note how it is not exactly a sweet and cuddly Christmas song. If you have time and find it helpful, read this passage again before answering the following questions about the text and the case study.

1. What new insights did you gain as you listened to this Christmas song with a missional ear? (Note: Most Christmas pageants only include verses 47-49. Why do you think they do so?)
2. What justice themes are included in Mary's prayer?
3. What about the "soft spoken elderly man's" comments to the panel on proclaiming Biblical justice caught your attention?
4. What themes in Mary's Song are brought up in the case study?
5. What themes in Mary's Song are being debated in our world, nation, and communities today?
6. What mission themes do you think we can we expect to find in Luke's Gospel?



Prayerful reflection

End this lesson with a brief group prayer inviting participants to thank God for one lesson learned or one question raised in each person's mind during today's lesson on mission from Luke.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL



During the week

If you have not already done so, read the gospel according to Luke in its entirety.

During today's class discussion you talked about the justice themes found in Mary's Song. Pick one theme from your discussion and consider exploring ways the issue is being addressed in your neighboring community.

- You might make a list of the different agencies in your community that are addressing this issue and contact some of them to see what resources they have that might benefit the class.
- You might take a survey of other faith communities in your community asking what they are doing to address your chosen justice issue. Do they need help?
- You might survey other members of your own faith community to listen to their thoughts about the chosen justice issue.

In preparation for next week

Come prepared next week to share what you learned about how your wider community is addressing your chosen justice issue. (For fun, you make want to bake some Christmas cookies to share while you give your report!)

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

Week Two: Looking Back and Looking Forward

Welcome back



This week we will discover that to understand Luke's Gospel the reader must look back and look forward; for Luke looks back to the Prophets of Israel and looks forward to the Acts of God's Spirit through the church. Isaiah shows what God's mission of justice includes; Luke shows how Jesus lived it! Acts shows how the church expands God's mission of justice beyond Israel to all people of all nations! It may come as a surprise to many that Jesus not only came to serve and to forgive people, but also to bring justice into a very unjust world. According to Luke, Jesus' mission included spiritual, social and economic liberation of the poor and oppressed, health care for the sick and proclaiming the year of economic parity (Jubilee) for all. Does that sound more like a political agenda than a spiritual mission? Perhaps it does, but it's not a political party platform, it's the mission of the Kingdom of God, and therefore, according to Luke, it's the mission of his faith community.

Begin class with prayer



Invite people to share what they did during the week and what they learned from the community exercise they chose. If some of the class used the week to finish their reading of Luke's gospel invite them to share their impressions.

As you move into a time of prayer, remember what has been shared as an act of prayer as well as any special needs or celebrations which the class brought with them today.

Let's investigate by looking back into scripture with Jesus



Begin your investigation by asking someone from the group to read Luke 4:14-30. Invite group members to write down their thoughts as this scripture passage is read.

Next, have another person read Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6-12. Invite group members to listen carefully to the reading of these two passages. If you have newsprint available, divide a sheet into two columns (one headed *Isaiah* and one headed *Luke*). Identify the themes in Luke and Isaiah by making a parallel list of the themes you find in each text.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

ISAIAH'S THEMES

LUKE'S THEMES

Spend time as a group sharing your answers to the following questions.

- Which themes do you find are common to Isaiah and Luke?
- What theme/s in Isaiah 61:1-2 is/are missing in Luke?
- From observing your list, what do you think Luke is trying to teach his faith community about being on God's mission?
- Looking at the Luke text again, note how the attitude of the crowd changes from praising Jesus as their hometown pride-and-joy to wanting to throw him off of a cliff. What do you think accounts for this dramatic change of attitude?

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL



Prayerful reflection

Take a moment to reflect in silence on today's lesson from Luke and Isaiah. Listen to your thoughts and passions. Is there a theme- or justice-related issue that comes into your mind? (It may or may not have been specifically mentioned in Luke or Isaiah.) After a time of reflection, share that word, phrase or issue of justice with the group and with God as a word or sentence of prayer.



During the week

Try to make time this week to visit one of the agencies you contacted last week. See if the agency needs volunteers in the near future. If they do, that may become a group project. Bring the information you learn to the class next week. If you don't have time to visit one of the agencies, perhaps you could pick one that works on an issue of justice that is on your heart. Then, decide to take time each day to remember the agency and the issue it addresses in prayer, being sensitive to what God might be saying to you and to your study group.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

Week Three: God's Spirit, Prayer and Mission



Welcome back!

Ever feel like life in general is overwhelming? If so, what happens when we add to it the realization that God calls us to participate in Jesus' mission? In both Luke's Gospel and in Luke's Acts of the Apostles, it is apparent that participation in God's mission in the world can be and often is overwhelming. For this reason, Luke focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of prayer for any faith community that seeks to follow Christ into the mission field of their neighboring community and beyond. In this week's lesson we'll investigate some of the roles prayer plays in undertaking God's mission.



Begin class with prayer

Go around the class, allowing people to share what justice activities were explored further this past week. If someone discovered a volunteer situation that may become a class project, take time to discuss it. Determine if it will be a class project or if there are individuals who would like to volunteer together.

For those who chose to take a justice issue and spend time during the week in prayer about it, ask them to share their experience.

After people are finished sharing, spend time remembering what was shared in prayer.



Let's investigate a study on Luke-Acts prayer and mission

If your class is large enough to divide into three groups, do so. Assign each group a set of scriptures from the three lists below. (If the class is not large enough for three working groups, then do the exercise as a class.) As you read each scripture, answer the following questions:

1. Who is praying?
2. What is being prayed for or about?
3. What happened when they prayed?

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

Group 1: Jesus' instruction and models of prayer.	Group 2: Prayers that Jesus prayed	Group 3: Prayer and the Acts of the Apostles
Luke 11:1-4	Luke 3:21	Acts 1:12-14
Luke 11:5-8	Luke 5:16	Acts 2:42
Luke 11:9-13	Luke 6:12	Acts 12:5-17
Luke 18:1-5	Luke 9:29	Acts 16:25
Luke 18:6-8	Luke 22:31, 32	Acts 20:31-38
Luke 21:36	Luke 22:39-46	Acts 21:5-6
	Luke 23:34, 46	Acts 4:23-31
		Acts 9:11-12

If you were able to divide your group up into three groups, bring them back together as a large group. Choose a member from each small group to report what you have learned about prayer and mission from your readings. Having heard the reports (or after discussing the scriptures as a group) answer the following:

1. What insights from these scriptures do you find that might encourage a more active prayer life in your faith community or among your group members?
2. Do you think your faith community is a community of prayer? Why or why not?
3. What role does prayer play in the mission activity of your faith community?

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL



Prayerful reflection

Based on your answers to the above three questions concerning the prayer life of your group, what would you like to say to God about your faith community's prayer life?



During the week

If the class decided to participate in a volunteer activity perhaps time will be needed to plan the participation. Set a time when volunteers can get together to plan and be engaged in the activities they have chosen.

In preparation for next week

Think about today's class discussion around prayer and mission. Find time to write out a prayer reflecting on your study journey so far and be prepared to share your prayer at the opening of next week's class. Also during the week, try to find time to read over the scripture lesson for next week: Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12; 24:44-49 and Acts 1:6-11. Remember to read these passages through the lens of mission.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

Week Four: Called to Go!



Welcome back!

Followers of Jesus are asked by Luke to go and bring God's mission of justice into the world they live in and beyond. In this week's study, you will find four different times that Luke shared where Jesus called his followers into mission. The purpose of this week's reflection is to help your study group consider the expanding scope of your missional faith journey.



Begin class with prayer

Form a circle for prayer and ask those who prepared prayers to share them with the class. For those who did not write out a prayer, you may join in the prayer by praying what is on your heart today.



Let's investigate

Ask four people from your group to read the following passages from Luke and Acts. Note how each passage is an example of Jesus sending his followers on mission. As you listen to these passages, make mental notes on the similarities and differences in each of the accounts of Jesus sending his followers on God's mission. After reading the passages, spend time discussing the questions that follow.

THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE

Luke 9: 1-6

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

THE MISSION OF THE SEVENTY

Luke 10:1-12

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Luke 24:44-49

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

THE GREAT COMMISSION #2

Acts 1: 6-11

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

UNIT FOUR: LEARNING MISSION FROM LUKE'S GOSPEL

After hearing the four passages read, go back over each individual passage and answer the following questions:

1. What is the mission?
2. Who is engaged in the mission?
3. What is being asked of those who are sent?
4. Who are the recipients of the mission?
5. What are results of the mission?
6. What does each account say to you about being sent on a mission?
7. What does this passage say to a local congregation about being active in mission?

During the week

Review your study of Luke, writing down missional insights and/or questions you have. Be prepared to share your list with your class next week.

In preparation for next week

Next time you gather as a class, you will begin Unit 5, Learning Mission *from* the Gospel according to John. As with previous units, try to find a time this week when you can read John in one or two sittings.

