

STUDY QUESTIONS

This study of Luke by biblical scholar and spiritual director Frederick Schmidt begins, “Luke had a story to tell and he told his story to change people’s lives.” From there he invites us into the gospel by focusing on five key themes that are essential to Christians today—the motifs of belonging, tradition, authority, ethics, and the future.

Introduction

Before you begin, pray together for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this work and study you are about to undertake, using the collect for St. Luke the physician at the beginning of this book. Ask for the grace to proceed with an open and flexible mind so that the encounter with this gospel might truly change you.

Take several hours to read the whole of Luke’s gospel in one sitting. Pay attention to what might be familiar in this gospel, such as the stories of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, and what seems alien or difficult. Note down particular passages that evince strong positive or negative reactions. What do you like best about this gospel? Which parts make you uncomfortable?

Chapter One: Telling the Old, Old Story

Luke’s gospel brings with it a spiritual challenge and questions that can be fruitfully pursued in connection with this “old, old story”:

- What is the story of your spiritual journey?
- Have you ever told it to anyone before?
- If you have, where does your story begin?

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- What have been the major plot complications?
- What have been the climactic moments?
- Where are you *now* in that story?
- If you have never told your spiritual story, how would you tell it?
- What would be your answers to the questions above about that journey?
- How does that story participate in the lives of your faith community?

Chapter Two: Belonging

This study of Luke begins with the question of *belonging*, especially as it applied to his Gentile readers. What kinds of listening and questions can foster a fruitful conversation with Luke's gospel about the spiritual quest for belonging? One approach might be to listen to the shape of this quest in Luke's gospel and ask, how does it challenge our understanding? What are the differences between belonging as

- option or necessity,
- right or gift,
- membership or identity?

A second approach might look at the fruitful questions that arise when we consider the vast distances between our culture and the culture to which Luke addressed his gospel. For some (not all) of us in the modern world, there is no reason to believe that individuality will not remain the center around which all of the rest of our social identities revolve. But does the familial and communal world in which Luke lived still raise important questions for us? For example:

- What are the limits of individualism?
- What does a church in relationship with Christ lose when individualism dominates?
- What aspects of our individualism might we surrender as members of the body of Christ?
- How would that surrender help us?

Finally, what it might mean to explore our identity in the terms echoed in the words, "*Ego Christus sum . . . I am Christ's?*"

- How would it change our lives to give it the kind of weight that the young prisoner gave it?
- How would belonging of that kind order all the other kinds of belonging that shape your life?

Chapter Three: Tradition

Luke's preoccupation with his Gentile audience, along with the negative light in which he portrays the responses of Jews to the preaching of Jesus, might lead to the conclusion that Luke is either uninterested or hostile to Judaism. But nothing could be further from the truth because the theme of *tradition* is highly significant in Luke's gospel, and Jewish tradition was his tradition.

What are the questions we might want to ask about Luke's view of tradition in the sacred story? Some of the more fruitful questions might be these:

- How do I understand tradition?
 - What is its character and purpose?
 - How do I relate to tradition?
 - Do I live in slavish dependence upon it?
 - Do I live in slavish rebellion against it?
 - How does slavish dependence upon or slavish rebellion against tradition make it harder to hear the voice of God?
 - Where do the greatest tensions between tradition and the obligation to listen for the voice of God arise in my life?
 - Can I honor tradition as God's gift and, at the same time, live with immediacy in God's presence?
 - Does Luke's portrayal of Jesus' ministry help me to visualize that balance?
- Can I name a specific way in which my life might change as a result of that reflection?

Chapter Four: Authority

When the question of tradition comes to the fore, the issue of authority is never far behind. It is never just a matter of *what* we believe. It is also a matter of what we *must* believe. What parts of the tradition are required? What parts can be rejected? The following

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questions might arise for you as part of the conversation we have with Luke's gospel about authority:

- How do I understand authority?
- How has that understanding been shaped by experience?
- How has that understanding conditioned my response to spiritual authority?
- What is my understanding of freedom?
- How has that understanding been shaped by experience?
- How has that understanding conditioned my response to spiritual freedom?
- What are the places in the church's life and in my life that are marked by the rough water of balancing freedom and authority?

Being as specific as possible about a particular situation:
can I say what a healthy balance might look like?

Chapter Five: Living at the End of Time

This chapter is about eschatology, the end of time and the coming of the kingdom of God. Living at the end of time, as Luke describes it, poses some of Scripture's most daunting spiritual questions. Concerning the time in which we live now, we might ask ourselves:

- Do I believe that my time is God's time?
- If I do, does that conviction shape my use of time?
- If I did, how would my use of time change?
- How would my attitude toward the past change?
- How would my attitude toward the future change?
- What would I do now?

Chapter Six: Living in the Here and Now

How can Christians reconcile the idea that the end is close at hand with the need to find a viable ethic for the here and now, the "in-between" time? Our own conversation with Luke about life in the here and now might fruitfully explore these questions:

- What do I think discipleship means? What does Luke tell me it means?
- Where does the word discipleship fit into my spiritual vocabulary?

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- Does it find a natural place in the shape of my spiritual life?
- If not, why not? Are there rough synonyms for it that shape my thinking about the spiritual life? Or is my language for it an evasion of the responsibility that goes with belonging to the kingdom of God?
- Are there specific ways in which the character of God informs my own life?
- Are my prayers in any way devoted to prayer for the kingdom of God?