

Discussion questions for week 1: Preparing for Ministry

1. What did you find interesting or relevant from the message on Sunday? Was there anything you disagreed with or found difficult?
2. When you hear the name “Jesus,” what image comes to mind? Why do you think you have that image? Do you tend to think of Jesus primarily as human (like us) or divine (different from us)?
3. Read Luke 2:41-52. What does this story tell us about Jesus’ identity? Why do you think the writer of Luke’s Gospel thought it was important to include this story?
4. Read Luke 3:1-20. What does John say about Jesus? How is John’s work similar to that of Jesus? How is it different? What strikes you about John’s instructions to the crowd, tax collectors, and soldiers?
5. Read Luke 3:21-38 (feel free to skip over most of the names, if you like!).
 - What does this passage say about the divinity of Jesus?
 - What does it say about his humanity?
 - The genealogy contains some important figures—like King David and Abraham. But most of the people listed in the genealogy are not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and we know nothing about these (apparently not very noteworthy!) people who provided a link in the family line to Jesus. Why might their inclusion in Scripture be significant for us today?
6. Read Luke 4:1-13. The speaker on Sunday suggested these temptations might be more “ordinary” than we often assume—e.g., the temptation to prioritize our own needs, to compromise to make life easier, or to want proof that God is with us.
 - Try to apply each the three temptations that Luke describes to your own context. Which do you relate to most, and why?
 - What role does the Holy Spirit play in this passage?
7. Later in Luke’s gospel, Jesus will say that God sends the Holy Spirit to all who ask (Luke 11:13), and the Christian Scriptures repeatedly talk the Holy Spirit dwelling in followers of Jesus. If the same Spirit that dwelt in Jesus dwells in us, what might that say about how...
 - ...we deal with temptation?
 - ...we view Jesus?
8. Share briefly with one another about an area where you feel the need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Take some time to pray for one another.

Practice for the week:

Take 5 minutes each morning to review your upcoming day. Pray for the Holy Spirit to empower you to deal with challenges—however small and ordinary—in a Christ-like way, reflecting love and justice.

Discussion questions for week 2: Building the Team

Before discussing these questions read this week's passage in Luke 4:14-6:16. Read it through as a story in one sitting.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. In your reading of the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most and why? What would you say is the general theme of this section and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?
3. This section starts with a frequent refrain in Luke: "Jesus returned... in the power of the Spirit." What do you think this means? What does being full of God's spirit look like in your own life and how would you say it happens?
4. In Luke 4: 31-44 the author uses the same word (rebuke) for Jesus confronting unclean spirits and illness. What does this say about the perspective on the spiritual world and the physical world in Luke? How might this be significant in relation to healing today?
5. In the story in Luke 4: 14-30
 - Why do you think Jesus quotes and edits passages from Isaiah? Why does he get such an angry response?
 - Jesus refers to a story about Elijah (you can read this in 1 Kings 17) and Elisha (you can read this in 2 Kings 5). Why do you think Jesus refers to these stories?
6. Can you describe a time when you have felt tension or rejection with people close to you (family or friends) because you have expressed a different opinion or challenged theirs? How did this feel? How does it compare to other similar situations with people to whom you are not so close? Are you feeling any such tension currently? How do you relate to Jesus' experience in this?
7. How do you relate to the crowd at the synagogue? How might you be indignant or resistant to a message of hope for people who feel like the enemy?
8. Take a moment to pray for one another especially with the discussion in 6 & 7 above in mind.

Practice for the week: The Examen

This week take some time each evening (or as many as you can manage) to reflect back on your day. Home in on situations when you were judgmental or critical of others. Reflect for a moment on how prejudice may have consciously or unconsciously influenced you and how a more merciful approach might have affected your attitude or actions. Remember that a merciful approach does not validate wrongdoing—you are not turning a blind eye to unjust or harmful actions. You are simply bringing mercy to the situation rather than judgment, and letting go of prejudice. After your reflection, invite God to help you be more aware of prejudice and empower you to bring mercy into such instances tomorrow.

Discussion questions for week 3: The Heart of Jesus' Ministry

Before discussing these questions read this week's passage in Luke 6:17-7:50. Read it through as a story in one sitting.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. In your reading of the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most, and why? What would you say is the general theme of this section, and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?
3. Read the beatitudes in Luke 6:20-23 and Matthew 5:3-12. What differences do you notice, and what similarities? Comparing the text to the one in Matthew, what issues is the author of Luke especially emphasizing, and why? Why do you think Luke includes three "woe oracles" (Luke 6:24-26) when Matthew doesn't?
4. Read the story about the healing of the centurion's servant in Luke 7:1-10. What makes this interaction so remarkable, and what message is it conveying about Jesus? How do you think the crowd would have reacted to Jesus' comments about the centurion?
5. In Luke 7:18-20 John the Baptist (who has been imprisoned) seems to have doubts about Jesus, and sends two of his disciples to ask him if he is the one. How do you relate to John in this situation? Have you ever felt like this, and why?
6. What do you make of Jesus' response in Luke 7:21-28, especially in light of the fact that Jesus has just raised a widow's only son from the dead (Luke 7:11-17) and John will eventually be beheaded? What does this say about following Jesus, and life in this new world order (the Kingdom of God) that Jesus is ushering in? How does this apply to you personally?
7. Take some time to share needs and pray with one another especially with regard to the conversations you've had in response to the questions above.

Practice for the week: Imaginative reading of scripture

Set aside some time this week to read the story below (from Luke 7:36-50) using your imagination. This is a modified form of an ancient method of reading scripture developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century.

Read the scripture 3 times. Don't try to think about it or analyze its meaning, but just try to feel it. In the first reading let yourself sink into the story, immerse yourself in the scene, and become aware of what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Who is there, and what are they doing? How does the situation make you feel? Let the story wash over you, and take some moments of silence afterwards. Let yourself become aware of who you identify with in the story. This could be one of the specific characters or someone just present and observing. Who are you drawn to?

Then read the story again. This time allow yourself to be that person with whom you identified. Experience the story from their perspective, through their eyes, and let your imagination engage with

their thoughts and feelings. Again, take some moments of silence after this reading to reflect on the experience.

In the third and final reading, imagine that Jesus is communicating with you in this scene. How does Jesus look at you, what does he say? What do you hear, and how does it make you feel? Sit in silence for a moment after the reading, and invite God to speak to your heart.

Reading: Luke 7:36-50 (NIV)

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Discussion questions for week 4: Teaching throughout Galilee

Before discussing these questions read this week's passage in Luke 8:1-9:50. Read it through as a story in one sitting.

1. What did you find interesting or relevant from the message on Sunday? Was there anything you disagreed with or found difficult?
2. In reading the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most and why? What would you say is the general theme of this section and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?

Note: *You might want to pick just a few of the questions from the list below, according to which stories are of more interest to you.*

3. In the stories in Luke 8:1-3 and 19-21, Jesus willfully transgresses social expectations about women's roles and value, and redefines family in a more inclusive way. What social expectations in our own culture should be transgressed? In what ways can you be more inclusive in your inter-personal relationships?
4. What is your favorite parable and why? What seems relevant to you right now in the parable of the sower in Luke 8:4-15? What do you think Jesus is saying in the parable about the lamp that immediately follows in Luke 8:16-18?
5. In the paired stories of calming the storm and healing the demon-possessed man in Luke 8:22-39, consider the following:
 - What do you see as parallels between the two stories?
 - What role does fear play in these stories?
 - In what ways is Jesus "good news" in these stories? To whom might he appear to be "bad news," and why?
6. Luke presents a "story within a story" with the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the hemorrhaging woman (Luke 8:40-56). Imagine you were a person in the crowd. What might you have thought and how might you have felt when...
 - ...you realized you had been exposed to an unclean woman?
 - ...Jesus spoke tenderly to her?
 - ...Jesus told Jairus not to be afraid?
 - ...Jesus said the girl was not dead but asleep?
 - ...you heard later that the girl was alive, and that Jesus wanted this kept quiet?
7. For the story of feeding the 5,000 men, consider the following:
 - In Luke 9:1-6, Jesus sends out the 12 disciples "to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." Why do you think he tells them not to take anything for the journey?
 - When they return, the crowds gather and Jesus (likewise) speaks about the kingdom of God and heals the sick. Why might the similarity in wording here be significant?
 - Why do you think Jesus tells the disciples to feed the crowds? In what ways do they do so?
 - What does this story tell us about
 - Jesus' identity as a Hebrew prophet?

- The social agenda of the kingdom of God?
 - The generosity of God?
 - The meaning of communion?
8. What do Luke 9:7-9 and 18-27 tell us about the way Jesus was perceived by the crowds? What do they tell us about Jesus' identity? In what ways was the promise of a Messiah an attractive idea, and the reality of Jesus as the Messiah an unattractive idea?
 9. For reasons of time, Luke 9:28-50 was not covered during the message on Sunday, but you may wish to think about the following:
 - The story of the transfiguration again confirms Jesus' identity as the greatest of Israel's prophets, and the Son of God. Following on from Jesus' prediction of suffering and death, why might this confirmation have been needed for the disciples? Why might it have been needed for Jesus?
 - In Luke 9:1-6, we read that Jesus gave authority to his disciples to drive out demons, and they went from village to village healing people everywhere. How might this shed light on Jesus' response in Luke 9:41?
 - What overarching themes in Luke do you see reiterated in the final section, Luke 9:43b-50?
 10. Take a moment to consider how any of these stories apply to you in your current circumstances and relationships. Share briefly, and pray for one another.

Practice for the week: *Lectio Divina*

Lectio Divina means "sacred reading" and is simply a prayerful way to read Scripture. You might think of it as conversing with God through Scripture. Pick one of the stories from this week's section of Luke, and then follow the steps below.

Read the Bible passage twice through, slowly and gently. Let the words flow over you. Savor each phrase, believing that God is present and has something for you. No need to search, simply listen for a word or phrase that somehow speaks to you or touches you. It might attract or even disturb you. Spend some time in silence with the word or phrase, just resting in it and allowing it to sink into your heart. Then read the passage slowly again.

Reflect or meditate on the word or phrase that stood out. How might it be speaking to you or challenging you? Allow memories, thoughts or situations evoked by the word to rise up gently. Allow God to reveal to you how the word or phrase applies to your life. Ask, "What meaning does this have for me here and now? What does God want me to know or to see?" Spend time in silence, reflecting on the phrase and allowing it to interact with your life. Now read the passage again.

Respond to God. Open your heart to God and openly and honestly share how you feel about your experience with the passage. These may be questions or doubts, or prayers of thanksgiving, petition, confession, lament, or praise.

Rest in God's presence. Allow your prayers to gently fade away and move into a time of simply resting in God's arms. Allow yourself freedom from thoughts, both mundane and holy. Open your mind, heart and soul to the fullness of God's love and peace. Rest.

Discussion questions for week 5: The Journey to Jerusalem Begins

Before discussing these questions read this week's passage in Luke 9:51-11:13. Read it through as a story in one sitting.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. In your reading of the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most and why? What would you say is the general theme of this section and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?
3. Read Luke 9:52-56. From your reading of Luke up to now, what factors do you think might have influence James and John to think about "calling down fire from heaven" on the Samaritans? Have you ever felt like this, and if so, what influenced you?
4. In Luke 9:57-62 Jesus talks about the cost of following him. What do you personally find most challenging about following Jesus?
5. Read Luke 10:1-24.
 - Jesus is sending his followers out with a sense of urgency. Why do you think Jesus is being so intense—what is so urgent? How might a sense of urgency be appropriate for us today?
 - Jesus references judgement multiple times in this passage. Why do you think he does this given his rebuke of James and John in Luke 9:52-56?
 - Compare Jesus' joyful response to his followers' return in Luke 10:21 to Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55. What encouragement do you take from this personally?
6. Why do you think the parable of the Good Samaritan has had such a far-reaching impact on our culture? In what ways is this familiarity positive in our society? How might it have a negative impact?
7. In Luke 10:38-42 Mary adopts the posture (and role) of a disciple whereas Martha takes on the culturally more traditional role of a woman. If Jesus is liberating women from oppressive cultural traditions, why do you think the church over the centuries has not followed suit? Why do you think many Christian denominations today still do not allow women to have leadership roles?
8. Take some time to practice the prayer exercise below in silence together. Afterwards allow some time for anyone to share their experience of the practice. Then discuss how being more centered on God's love might affect our own lives, particularly with what we've been learning from Luke in mind.

Practice for the week: Receiving the Holy Spirit

At the end of Jesus' teaching on prayer in Luke 11:13, he says that God is completely ready to share the Holy Spirit with us. We've already seen that when Jesus was filled with the Spirit in Luke 3:21-22 it was an expression of God's love. Set aside some moments this week to consciously be aware of and absorb God's love through the simple practice below:

Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet planted on the floor, arms relaxed, and hands supported in your lap. Close your eyes and relax your shoulders. To begin, listen to your breath as you breathe. Feel your breath in your nostrils, chest, and abdomen, inhaling and then exhaling fully and deeply—hold your exhale a bit longer than usual to completely expel air. This has a very soothing, cleansing effect. Breathing accompanied by prayer will also help you to "wake up" and "breathe in" the love of God as you calm your mind, heart, and body. As you breathe, imagine the room filled with God's love for you. Take a few moments to get used to this. Allow yourself to imagine God's passionate affection for you. As you breathe in, breathe in God's love. As you breathe out, relax into this love. With each in-breath imagine yourself being filled more and more with God's love. With each out-breath relax deeper and deeper into this love. Don't resist it but surrender to it. If your thoughts stray or you begin to feel unloved, just become aware of your breathing again and focus on breathing in God's love.

Discussion questions for week 6: Growing Conflict and Controversy

Before discussing these questions read this week's passage in [Luke 11:14—13:35](#). Read it through as a story in one sitting.

1. What did you find interesting or relevant from the message on Sunday? Was there anything you disagreed with or found difficult?
2. In reading the whole passage, which stories or sections jump out to you most and why? What would you say is the general theme of this section and why do you think the author is emphasizing this?
3. Look at the different responses to Jesus' healing of the mute man.
 - How do you think you would have responded?
 - How do Jesus' sayings about light in Luke 11:33-36 relate to the various responses of his critics, the crowd, and those who wanted a sign?
 - How might these sayings relate to you?
4. In the story of Jesus having dinner at the Pharisee's house (Luke 11:37-54), why do you think Jesus spoke with such apparent harshness? How does this impact your view of Jesus?
5. At the beginning of chapter 12, Jesus warns his disciples: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." In what ways do we still struggle with "the yeast of the Pharisees"?
6. Jesus speaks tenderly in Luke 12:32: "'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.'" What does this section (Luke 12:13-34) teach us about anxiety? Are there areas in your life where you feel anxiety right now?
7. Jesus' healing of the woman in synagogue (Luke 13:10-17) is a beautiful story we have looked at many times. In what ways is this a story of liberation? Are there any situations or relationships right now that are weighing you down, and leave you feeling like you cannot stand tall?
8. Take some time to pray for one another, particularly in light of your responses to questions 6 and 7.

Practice for the week: Welcoming Prayer with Nature

The chapters for this week are full of heavy emotions: fear and anxiety about the future, the human tendency to be judgmental, the burdens of guilt and shame we carry, and the difficulty and cost of pursuing Jesus' way of love. But also in these chapters are reminders that God is with us, caring for us, providing for us, loving us unconditionally. Jesus points to the sparrows, the ravens and the wildflowers as illustrations of God's loving care. He describes himself as like a mother hen wanting to cover her chicks with her wings.

Take some time this week to identify any heavy emotions you are experiencing, and surrender these emotions to God. You may find the Welcoming Prayer (below) helpful in doing this. Then take a walk in nature—or watch a nature video, if that is not possible—and reflect on the power, creativity, and

tenderness of God. (Here are a few examples of videos of [birds](#), [wildflowers](#), and a [mother hen with her chicks](#).)

Welcoming Prayer

- **Notice, focus and sink in** to your emotion— Go *toward it* rather than suppress or struggle with it. Don't run away from it or fight it or react to it instinctively or habitually. Stay with this step of noticing and sinking in until you really experience a connection to the feeling, not just in your emotional being but even getting in touch with it on a physical level—do not bypass or rush through this part. It may help you get more deeply in touch with it to take time to feel and identify specifically where in your body you are carrying it or most feel it. Sometimes it helps to sink in to the feeling by placing your hand on the place in the body where you are feeling it. (Note: what we are noticing and welcoming is not the thing that triggered our strong feelings, but the *feelings themselves*.)
- **Welcome** — Affirm who you are as a child beloved of God and where you are in your journey by treating this identified feeling/urge etc. not as an enemy but as a friend who can teach you something and help set you free. Name in your mind the feeling and then say, "Welcome [fear/anger/worry/shame, etc.]." Don't just say this and move on. Repeat it and sit with the feeling until you experience a genuine sense that you acknowledge it as where you are at this moment, and that you are not fighting against it. Don't judge the feeling as "bad" or "sinful", which may contribute to simply stuffing it back down inside.
- **Let Go**—When you have allowed yourself to name and accept the feeling, let it go by saying, "God, I give you my [fear/anger/worry/shame, etc.]" and try to feel yourself letting go. Then make the following statements about surrendering your deepest needs to God, no matter what the specific issue is, recognizing the deep seated needs that are the source of many of our feelings, that only God can truly satisfy:
 - "I let go of my desire for safety and security in this situation."
 - "I let go of my desire for esteem and affection in this situation."
 - "I let go of my desire for power and control in this situation."
 - "I let go of my desire to change the situation."

Stay in the letting go, or turn back to the focus or welcome stages as appropriate. When your welcoming time is complete, thank God for God's presence and love with you, empowering you and setting you free.