

What People Are Saying about Threshold Bible Study

“Stephen Binz’s Threshold Bible Study is a marvelous project. With lucidity and creativity, Binz offers today’s believing communities a rich and accessible treasury of biblical scholarship. The series’ brilliance lies in its simplicity of presentation complemented by critical depth of thought and reflective insight. This is a wonderful gift for personal and communal study, especially for those wishing to make a home for the Word in their hearts.”

■ **CAROL J. DEMPSEY, OP**, *Professor of Theology,
University of Portland, OR*

“God’s Holy Word addresses the deepest levels of our lives with the assurance of divine grace and wisdom for our individual and communal faith. I am grateful for this new series introducing our Catholic people to the riches of Sacred Scripture. May these guides to understanding the great truths of our Redemption bring us all closer to the Lord of our salvation.”

■ *Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York*

“Threshold Bible Study offers solid scholarship and spiritual depth. Drawing on the Church’s living Tradition and the Jewish roots of the New Testament, Threshold Bible Study can be counted on for lively individual study and prayer, even while it offers spiritual riches to deepen communal conversation and reflection among the people of God.”

■ **SCOTT HAHN**, *founder of the St. Paul Center
for Biblical Theology*

“Threshold Bible Study is a refreshing approach to enable participants to ponder the Scriptures more deeply. The thematic material is clearly presented with a mix of information and spiritual nourishment. The questions are thoughtful and the principles for group discussion are quite helpful. This series provides a practical way for faithful people to get to know the Bible better and to enjoy the fruits of biblical prayer.”

■ **IRENE NOWELL, OSB**, *Mount St. Scholastica,
Atchison, Kansas*

“The distance many feel between the Word of God and their everyday lives can be overwhelming. It need not be so. Threshold Bible Study is a fine blend of the best of biblical scholarship and a realistic sensitivity to the spiritual journey of the believing Christian. I recommend it highly.”

■ **FRANCIS J. MOLONEY, SDB**, *Senior Professorial Fellow
at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne*

“Stephen Binz offers an invaluable guide that can make reading the Bible enjoyable (again) and truly nourishing. A real education on how to read the Bible, this series prepares people to discuss Scripture and to share it in community.”

■ **JACQUES NIEUVIARTS**, *Professor of Scripture,
Institut Catholique de Toulouse, France*

“Threshold Bible Study is appropriately named, for its commentary and study questions bring people to the threshold of the text and invite them in. The questions guide but do not dominate. They lead readers to ponder and wrestle with the biblical passages and take them across the threshold toward life with God. Stephen Binz’s work stands in the tradition of the biblical renewal movement and brings it back to life. We need more of this in the Church.”

■ **KATHLEEN M. O’CONNOR**, *Professor of Old Testament,
Columbia Theological Seminary*

“I most strongly recommend Stephen Binz’s Threshold Bible Study for adult Bible classes, religious education, and personal spiritual enrichment. The series is exceptional for its scholarly solidity, pastoral practicality, and clarity of presentation. The church owes Binz a great debt of gratitude for his generous and competent labor in the service of the Word of God.”

■ **PETER C. PHAN**, *The Ignacio Ellacuria Professor
of Catholic Social Thought, Georgetown University*

“Threshold Bible Study is the perfect series of Bible study books for serious students with limited time. Each lesson is brief, illuminating, challenging, wittily written, and a pleasure to study. The reader will reap a rich harvest of wisdom from the efforts expended.”

■ **JOHN J. PILCH**, *Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies,
Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.*

“Threshold Bible Study helpfully introduces the lay reader into the life-enhancing process of *Lectio Divina* or prayerful reading of Scripture, individually or in a group. This series, prepared by a reputable biblical scholar and teacher, responds creatively to the exhortation of the Council to provide God’s people abundant nourishment from the table of God’s word. The process proposed leads the reader from Bible study to personal prayer, community involvement, and active Christian commitment in the world.”

■ **SANDRA M. SCHNEIDERS**, *Professor of New Testament
and Spirituality, Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley*

THRESHOLD
BIBLE STUDY

JESUS,
the COMPASSIONATE
SAVIOR

PART ONE

Luke
[1-11]

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How to Use Threshold Bible Study

Threshold Bible Study is a dynamic, informative, inspiring, and life-changing series that helps you learn about Scripture in a whole new way. Each book will help you explore new dimensions of faith and discover deeper insights for your life as a disciple of Jesus.

The threshold is a place of transition. The threshold of God's word invites you to enter that place where God's truth, goodness, and beauty can shine into your life and fill your mind and heart. Through the Holy Spirit, the threshold becomes holy ground, sacred space, and graced time. God can teach you best at the threshold, because God opens your life to his word and fills you with the Spirit of truth.

With Threshold Bible Study each topic or book of the Bible is approached in a thematic way. You will understand and reflect on the biblical texts through overarching themes derived from biblical theology. Through this method, the study of Scripture will impact your life in a unique way and transform you from within.

These books are designed for maximum flexibility. Each study is presented in a workbook format, with sections for reading, reflecting, writing, discussing, and praying. Each Threshold book contains thirty lessons, which you can use for your daily study over the course of a month or which can be divided into six lessons per week, providing a group study of six weekly sessions (the first session deals with the Introduction). These studies are ideal for Bible study groups, small Christian communities, adult faith formation, student groups, Sunday school, neighborhood groups, and family reading, as well as for individual learning.

The commentary that follows each biblical passage launches your reflection on that passage and helps you begin to see its significance within the context of your contemporary experience. The questions following the commentary challenge you to understand the passage more fully and apply it to your own life. Space for writing after each question is ideal for personal study and also allows group participants to prepare for the weekly discussion. The prayer helps conclude your study each day by integrating your learning into your relationship with God.

The method of Threshold Bible Study is rooted in the ancient tradition of *lectio*

divina, whereby studying the Bible becomes a means of deeper intimacy with God and a transformed life. Reading and interpreting the text (*lectio*) is followed by reflective meditation on its message (*meditatio*). This reading and reflecting flows into prayer from the heart (*oratio* and *contemplatio*). In this way, one listens to God through the Scripture and then responds to God in prayer.

This ancient method assures you that Bible study is a matter of both the mind and the heart. It is not just an intellectual exercise to learn more and be able to discuss the Bible with others. It is, more importantly, a transforming experience. Reflecting on God's word, guided by the Holy Spirit, illumines the mind with wisdom and stirs the heart with zeal.

Following the personal Bible study, Threshold Bible Study offers ways to extend personal *lectio divina* into a weekly conversation with others. This communal experience will allow participants to enhance their appreciation of the message and build up a spiritual community (*collatio*). The end result will be to increase not only individual faith but also faithful witness in the context of daily life (*operatio*).

When bringing Threshold Bible Study to a church community, try to make every effort to include as many people as possible. Many will want to study on their own; others will want to study with family, a group of friends, or a few work associates; some may want to commit themselves to share insights through a weekly conference call, daily text messaging, or an online social network; and others will want to gather weekly in established small groups.

By encouraging Threshold Bible Study and respecting the many ways people desire to make Bible study a regular part of their lives, you will widen the number of people in your church community who study the Bible regularly in whatever way they are able in their busy lives. Simply sign up people at the Sunday services and order bulk quantities for your church. Encourage people to follow the daily study as faithfully as they can. This encouragement can be through Sunday announcements, notices in parish publications, support on the church website, and other creative invitations and motivations.

Through the spiritual disciplines of Scripture reading, study, reflection, conversation, and prayer, Threshold Bible Study will help you experience God's grace more abundantly and root your life more deeply in Christ. The risen Jesus said: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev 3:20). Listen to the Word of God, open the door, and cross the threshold to an unimaginable dwelling with God!

SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

- Make your Bible reading a time of prayer. Ask for God's guidance as you read the Scriptures.
- Try to study daily, or as often as possible according to the circumstances of your life.
- Read the Bible passage carefully, trying to understand both its meaning and its personal application as you read. Some persons find it helpful to read the passage aloud.
- Read the passage in another Bible translation. Each version adds to your understanding of the original text.
- Allow the commentary to help you comprehend and apply the scriptural text. The commentary is only a beginning, not the last word, on the meaning of the passage.
- After reflecting on each question, write out your responses. The very act of writing will help you clarify your thoughts, bring new insights, and amplify your understanding.
- As you reflect on your answers, think about how you can live God's word in the context of your daily life.
- Conclude each daily lesson by reading the prayer and continuing with your own prayer from the heart.
- Make sure your reflections and prayers are matters of both the mind and the heart. A true encounter with God's word is always a transforming experience.
- Choose a word or a phrase from the lesson to carry with you throughout the day as a reminder of your encounter with God's life-changing word.
- For additional insights and affirmation, share your learning experience with at least one other person whom you trust. The ideal way to share learning is in a small group that meets regularly.

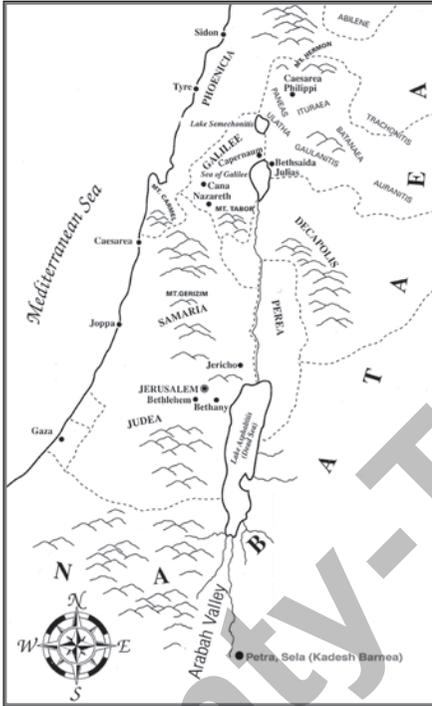
SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

- Meet regularly; weekly is ideal. Try to be on time, and make attendance a high priority for the sake of the group. The average group meets for about an hour.
- Open each session with a prepared prayer, a song, or a reflection. Find some appropriate way to bring the group from the workaday world into a sacred time of graced sharing.
- If you have not been together before, name tags are very helpful as group members begin to become acquainted with one another.
- Spend the first session getting acquainted with one another, reading the Introduction aloud, and discussing the questions that follow.
- Appoint a group facilitator to provide guidance to the discussion. The role of facilitator may rotate among members each week. The facilitator simply keeps the discussion on track; each person shares responsibility for the group. There is no need for the facilitator to be a trained teacher.
- Try to study the six lessons on your own during the week. When you have done your own reflection and written your own answers, you will be better prepared to discuss the six scriptural lessons with the group. If you have not had an opportunity to study the passages during the week, meet with the group anyway to share support and insights.
- Participate in the discussion as much as you are able, offering your thoughts, insights, feelings, and decisions. You learn by sharing with others the fruits of your study.
- Be careful not to dominate the discussion. It is important that everyone in the group be offered an equal opportunity to share the results of their work. Try to link what you say to the comments of others so that the group remains on the topic.
- When discussing your own personal thoughts or feelings, use “I” language. Be as personal and honest as appropriate, and be very cautious about giving advice to others.

- Listen attentively to the other members of the group so as to learn from their insights. The words of the Bible affect each person in a different way, so a group provides a wealth of understanding for each member.
- Don't fear silence. Silence in a group is as important as silence in personal study. It allows individuals time to listen to the voice of God's Spirit and the opportunity to form their thoughts before they speak.
- Solicit several responses for each question. The thoughts of different people will build on the answers of others and will lead to deeper insights for all.
- Don't fear controversy. Differences of opinions are a sign of a healthy and honest group. If you cannot resolve an issue, continue on, agreeing to disagree. There is probably some truth in each viewpoint.
- Discuss the questions that seem most important for the group. There is no need to cover all the questions in the group session.
- Realize that some questions about the Bible cannot be resolved, even by experts. Don't get stuck on some issue for which there are no clear answers.
- Whatever is said in the group is said in confidence and should be regarded as such.
- Pray as a group in whatever way feels comfortable. Pray for the members of your group throughout the week.

Schedule for Group Study

Session 1: Introduction	Date: _____
Session 2: Lessons 1–6	Date: _____
Session 3: Lessons 7–12	Date: _____
Session 4: Lessons 13–18	Date: _____
Session 5: Lessons 19–24	Date: _____
Session 6: Lessons 25–30	Date: _____





“My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” Luke 2:30-32

Jesus, the Compassionate Savior (Part 1)

Luke was a gifted writer with an excellent command of the Greek language. He could have chosen any number of forms in which to communicate the good news of Jesus: a letter, like Paul; a homily, like the author of Hebrews; an apocalypse, like John in Revelation. Luke’s work is not a catechism or a theological treatise. Rather, Luke chose to write a narrative, “an orderly account of the events” (1:1), a form of literature that many had employed before him.

As a narrative, the gospel of Luke presents the storyline of Jesus’ life in order to assure his readers of “the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed” (1:4). Luke’s readers had already been instructed in Christian teaching and the core events of the life of Jesus. But Luke wants to present those events in a way that engages his readers and presents the events of salvation in a grand narrative.

He tells the story not merely as a historical record, but in a way that enables readers to enter the story themselves and to discover it as their own good news. To do this effectively, Luke presents the episodes from the life of Jesus with great detail and concreteness. The narrative uses language that evokes the imagination of the readers and presents episodes from the life of Jesus that become significant within the individual lives of the readers. Luke's artistic description of each scene minimizes his need for long discourses. A brief dialogue or a short saying is enough to engage the readers and communicate the message.

Luke addresses his work to a certain "Theophilus" (1:3), a Gentile man of rank and a recent convert to Christianity. The shape of Luke's gospel suggests that Theophilus was experiencing uncertainty about his place in a movement that was originally Jewish. Yet, Luke did not write just for one person, but for any non-Jew who felt out of place in the church. Theophilus, whose name means "beloved of God," represents all Gentiles seeking to understand God's universal plan of salvation.

Still, after nearly two millennia, Luke's narrative draws in readers who come to experience the story of Jesus as their own. The gospel becomes truly good news for the lives of people today in every nation, of every race, language, and culture. Luke continues to show people how the stories of Jesus transcend their setting in first-century Palestine to speak powerfully to people today.

As we read his narrative, Luke invites us to listen to the word of God and to put it into practice. We can do that by following the example of Mary who reflected on the events of Jesus' life in her heart (2:19, 51). She is the ideal disciple—the one who hears the word of God and observes it (11:28). That is our challenge as we read the narrative of Luke—to become disciples of Jesus by listening, reflecting, and doing the word of God today.

Reflection and discussion

- Why did Luke choose "narrative" as the literary form for communicating the good news of Jesus Christ?

- How can Luke's writings from the ancient world become truly good news for people today?

The Gospel of Salvation for All

Jesus is continually doing the unexpected in Luke's gospel. He upsets people's routine manner of thinking about God's ways and about what salvation means. As we enter the narrative of Luke we should expect to be surprised and even upset at Jesus because he challenges our routine ways of thinking about God. If we are not astounded or disturbed, then we are not reading the gospel afresh. God is the one who casts rulers from their thrones and lifts up the lowly, the one who fills the hungry and empties the rich. When Mary first heard this good news of God's intervention in her life, she was stunned. God wants to intervene in our lives too. Let us expect to be disturbed and changed as we come to experience the story of Jesus as our own.

One of the most obvious characteristics of the writings of Luke is his inclusiveness. All people can come to Jesus and be included in his offer of salvation: the poor and the rich, the Gentiles and the Jews, women and men, foreigners and Israelites, the healthy and the sick, the sinners and the saints. Jesus associates with the sinners, prostitutes, and tax collectors, and he even shares table fellowship with them. The inclusiveness of Jesus' love for all people extends even to those who crucify him, and is demonstrated in his prayer for their forgiveness. Our call to evangelize is rooted in the mission he gave his church to extend his salvation to all people.

The gospel presents a new way of relating to God by turning to him through Jesus. This plan of God for salvation includes peoples of all ethnicities and backgrounds. The mission of Jesus is stated in several forms: he came "to bring good news to the poor" (4:18), "to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance" (5:32), "to seek out and to save the lost" (19:10). Luke shows that all who are needy can encounter a concerned and compassionate God

through Jesus. As Savior, Messiah, and Lord (2:11), Jesus is the divine instrument of God's plan to save the world. His message is one of hope and transformation. God's promises, revealed in the ancient Scriptures, are fulfilled for all who turn to Jesus, reorient their lives, and trust in him. This salvation involves sharing in hope, receiving forgiveness, experiencing God's kingdom, and being enlivened by the Holy Spirit. Such care and compassion know no boundaries of race, gender, or class.

Luke's gospel should be read within the context of Luke's two-volume work: the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Acts is a continuation of the narrative of the gospel. It begins when Jesus is taken up into heaven, and it tells the story of the early church. Volume one is the gospel of Jesus Christ; volume two may be called the good news of the Holy Spirit. The two volumes form one continuous narrative, showing the spread of God's salvation from ancient Israel to all the nations of the earth. Luke writes his gospel in a way that demonstrates how the ministry of Jesus relates to the life of the early church and how being disciples of Jesus means belonging to the people who continue to follow him as the resurrected Savior and universal Lord.

Reflection and discussion

- What does it mean to me to acknowledge Jesus as the Savior?

- What might be an important message that Luke's gospel could offer to people in our culture today?

Prayer Is the Heart of Luke's Gospel

Luke's writing is filled with a spirit of prayer. This prayerful tone is conveyed to us in several ways in his gospel. First, the gospel contains four prayers that have become the most exalted prayers of the church through the ages. Second, Luke shows Jesus at prayer more than any other evangelist. Jesus prays often during his public life and demonstrates that regular prayer is essential for anyone who wants to follow in his way. Third, Luke shows Jesus teaching his disciples to pray and includes several teachings and parables about prayer that are found only in his gospel.

The four prayers from Luke's gospel come to us on the lips of four prayerful people whose examples teach us to pray: Zechariah, Mary, Simeon, and Jesus. These four prayers have been incorporated in the liturgical prayer of the church. The church's morning prayer culminates in the prayer of Zechariah: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel..." (Luke 1:68-79). The evening liturgical prayer leads up to the prayer of Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." (1:46-55). Both of these hours of prayer conclude with the prayer that Jesus taught, the prayer that is included in the Communion rite of every Eucharistic liturgy, his prayer to the Father (11:2-4). Finally, the night prayer of the church features the prayer of Simeon: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word..." (2:29-32).

Throughout his gospel, Luke continually makes special note of the fact that Jesus prayed. These times in which Jesus is described as being at prayer are mostly moments of revelation, decision, and transition in the gospel. Luke is the only gospel to state that Jesus was praying after his baptism (3:21). His prayer continues through the descent of the Holy Spirit and the voice of God from heaven declaring Jesus his beloved Son. This critical moment at the inauguration of Jesus' public life takes place within the context of Jesus' prayerful communication with the Father.

Like the revelation of Jesus at his baptism, his revelation at the scene of transfiguration also takes place in the context of prayerful communion with God. Jesus "went up on the mountain to pray" and the appearance of Jesus was transfigured "while he was praying" (9:28-29). At both the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, Luke tells his readers that prayer must be the setting in which we discover and discern the significance of Jesus for our lives.

Luke is careful to note that Jesus demonstrated a balance between his public

ministry and his life of solitary prayer. He reports that great crowds assembled to listen to the teaching of Jesus and to be cured of illnesses. However, Luke says, Jesus “would withdraw to deserted places and pray” (5:16). The tense of the Greek verb here suggests that the withdrawal of Jesus for prayer was a repeated action. Jesus would periodically withdraw for the purpose of prayer during his busy public life.

Luke tells us that Jesus, before choosing the twelve apostles, “went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God” (6:12). His praying on the mountain throughout the night enabled him to make that critical choice wisely and confidently. Another critical moment of the gospel occurs when Jesus questions his disciples concerning his identity: “Who do the crowds say that I am? Who do you say that I am?” Only Luke sets this crucial scene in the context of prayer: “Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him” (9:18). Jesus could have been praying privately while his disciples were around him, or Jesus could have been praying with his disciples but away from the crowds. Either way, the scene teaches us that discerning the identity of Jesus and who he is in our lives is done best in quiet, reflective prayer.

Finally, Luke shows us that prayer was the context in which Jesus began and ended his passion. At the Last Supper Jesus tells Peter, “I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail” (22:32), as he foretells Peter’s denial and repentance. When Jesus went to the Mount of Olives before his arrest, Luke notes that he went to a particular place where he prayed regularly. There Jesus asked his closest disciples to pray. And he withdrew from them a ways and then knelt down to pray intensely to his Father (22:39-41). Jesus prays in agony, asking that the cup of suffering pass from him, but also surrendering himself to the Father’s will. At the end of his passion, the final words of Jesus are from Israel’s book of prayer, the Psalms. “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (23:46; Psalm 31:5) is the prayer of Jesus from the cross as he breathed his last.

The disciples must have seen Jesus go away often for times of prayer. They saw how important prayer was for Jesus, and they saw how Jesus prayed in all the critical moments of his life. Jesus gave silent witness to the value of prayer, and it was this personal witness that inspired his disciples to request that he teach them to pray. Luke tells us that Jesus “was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’”

(11:1). Luke invites us, his readers, to go off with Jesus and to learn from him how to pray.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray as he prayed (11:2-4). The prayer is addressed to God as Father, showing disciples that we can share in Jesus' intimate relationship with God. It is simple and direct; it praises God, requests the basic needs of life, and asks for God's forgiveness. It is the prayer the Christian community has continued to pray since the days of Jesus.

The Lord's Prayer in Luke is followed by teachings of Jesus about prayer. Jesus exhorts his disciples to be persistent in prayer by telling of a man who came to a friend in the middle of the night to borrow bread for a traveler to whom he was offering hospitality. Though the friend did not get up immediately, he eventually got up to "give him whatever he needs" because of the man's persistence in asking (11:5-8). Jesus teaches persistence in prayer not because we have to convince God to answer us or to wear down God's resistance. Jesus teaches persistence, rather, to overcome our tendency to give up on prayer too easily or to pray too sporadically.

Jesus then urges the disciples to pray with confidence. Though we may sometimes wonder whether our prayers are heard by God, Jesus declares, "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (11:9). He compares the generosity of an earthly father with the lavish generosity of God. Jesus concludes this teaching by asking, "If you then...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (11:13). We can have the utmost confidence because God is more than a friend; God is a loving Father who knows and responds to all our needs.

In another section of the gospel, Jesus teaches about prayer by telling two parables. The point of the first parable is provided by Luke's introduction: "Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart" (18:1). In the parable a widow continues to insist on her rights from a corrupt and dishonest judge. Because of her persistence, the judge rendered a favorable decision for her (18:2-5). "Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night?" (18:7), Jesus asks. We might not think that God is hearing our prayer; we might get discouraged and quit praying when we do not seem to get results. But we ought never to lose heart; we can trust in God to answer our prayers.

The second parable tells of a Pharisee and a tax collector who both went up

to the temple to pray. The Pharisee told God all that he was doing and bragged about his “spiritual” accomplishments (18:11-12). The tax collector, in contrast, beat his breast and offered a simple and humble prayer: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (18:13). The parable teaches us to express our dependence on God’s mercy, aware of our need of forgiveness and grace.

Jesus’ final teaching on prayer comes as he enters his passion and is praying on the Mount of Olives. He told his disciples, “Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial” (22:46). As Jesus was experiencing his prayerful agony, he was teaching his disciples to pray in times of tribulation and turmoil. As Jesus demonstrates, prayer can be an act of desperation in the critical moments of life. It can be what we do when we don’t know what else can be done.

In all of these ways, Luke shows that prayer is the heart of the gospel. By showing his disciples how to pray, when to pray, and why to pray, Jesus encourages them to be a prayerful community. These teachings of Jesus take root in the disciples, and so the Acts of the Apostles demonstrates that prayer is at the heart of the early church. The community of disciples takes the teachings of Jesus to heart and prays, not only at times of decision and transition in the church, but as part of the regular rhythm of Christian life. In this way, Luke’s gospel continually forms each generation of disciples into a community of prayer.

Reflection and discussion

- What are the moments in the life of Jesus in which Luke spotlights the prayer of Jesus?

- How does the example of Jesus' prayer in the gospel encourage and inspire my own life of prayer?

Learning to Read Luke's Good News

There is a tradition retained in Greek Orthodox Christianity that Luke was a painter. Whether or not there is any historical validity to this understanding, we can imagine Luke painting many of the scenes that he so vividly describes in his gospel. If he didn't paint with oils, we know that he certainly painted with words. And the beautiful images he gives us in his gospel have inspired artists through the centuries of Christianity to present his gospel stories in frescoes, mosaics, icons, stained glass, and canvas.

Learning how to appreciate a work of art can also teach us about how to approach the Scriptures. Sometimes we read the Bible with too much emphasis on simply learning information, on understanding what the text says. Understanding the Scriptures does not necessarily mean being able to interpret every sentence on every page. Sometimes what we need to do is simply reflect in wonder on the images presented in the sacred text and notice the emotions that arise in our hearts. This seems to be what Mary did. She had a contemplative sense of wonder toward these divine mysteries. She kept all of these things and pondered them in her heart. We can learn from Mary how to reflectively ponder the good news of her Son as a work of art.

A second ancient tradition claims that Luke was a physician. In fact, Paul refers to Luke in his letter to the Colossians as "the beloved physician" (Col 4:14). Whether or not Luke practiced as a medical doctor, we can be sure that Luke was a person very sensitive to people in need. His gospel reflects more than any other gospel the human needs of the poor, ill, and suffering. Perhaps this description of Luke can help us learn to read the gospel with another emphasis. When Luke describes scenes of people who are ill or cast aside, he is encouraging us to look for similar scenes in our own world, and then to do

something about them. The gospel of Luke invites us to be instruments in the healing of others in order to be disciples in our own world today. Like Mary, we can become active contemplatives, “those who hear the word of God and do it” (8:21).

Finally, Luke is known in the Christian tradition as a companion of Paul. In his letter to Philemon, Paul mentions Luke as one of his “fellow workers” (Phlm 24). In recounting Paul’s travels in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke often uses the pronoun “we.” These so-called “we” sections portray the author as a traveling companion of Paul. With the great “apostle to the Gentiles,” Luke learned to evangelize, to proclaim the gospel in word and in deed, with passion and with love. Contemplating his gospel can help us, too, be ardent disciples, devoted to helping others know and understand the good news of Jesus Christ as God’s plan for the world’s salvation.

Reflection and discussion

- How can I better appreciate the gospel by understanding Luke’s work as that of a literary artist?

- What am I hoping to experience as I begin to study and reflect on this Gospel according to Luke?

Prayer

Lord God, you raised up Luke among the peoples of the Gentile world to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ and to evangelize through writing this narrative of his life. Prepare my heart to encounter Jesus through the pages of this Gospel according to Luke. Stir up within me a deep desire to know and follow him more deeply and personally. Show me how to take these words to heart and to meditate upon them. Help me to respond to the invitation of Jesus to listen, reflect, and do the word of God today. Keep me faithful these weeks to the challenges of study and prayer that your word offers to me.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS, GROUP SESSION 1

1. If the group is meeting for the first time, or if there are newcomers joining the group, it is helpful to provide nametags.
2. Distribute the books to the members of the group.
3. You may want to ask the participants to introduce themselves and tell the group a bit about themselves.
4. Ask one or more of these introductory questions:
 - What drew you to join this group?
 - What is your biggest fear in beginning this Bible study?
 - How is beginning this study like a “threshold” for you?
5. You may want to pray this prayer as a group:

Come upon us, Holy Spirit, to enlighten and guide us as we begin this study of Luke’s gospel. You inspired the writers of the Scriptures to reveal your presence throughout the history of salvation. This inspired word has the power to convert our hearts and change our lives. Fill our hearts with desire, trust, and confidence as you shine the light of your truth within us. Motivate us to read the Scriptures, and give us a deeper love for God’s word each day. Bless us during this session and throughout the coming week with the fire of your love.
6. Read the Introduction aloud, pausing at each question for discussion. Group members may wish to write the insights of the group as each question is discussed. Encourage several members of the group to respond to each question.
7. Don’t feel compelled to finish the complete Introduction during the session. It is better to allow sufficient time to talk about the questions raised than to rush to the end. Group members may read any remaining sections on their own after the group meeting.
8. Instruct group members to read the first six lessons on their own during the six days before the next group meeting. They should write out their own answers to the questions as preparation for next week’s group discussion.
9. Fill in the date for each group meeting under “Schedule for Group Study.”
10. Conclude the session by praying aloud together the prayer at the end of the Introduction.