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# THE LOOKOUT

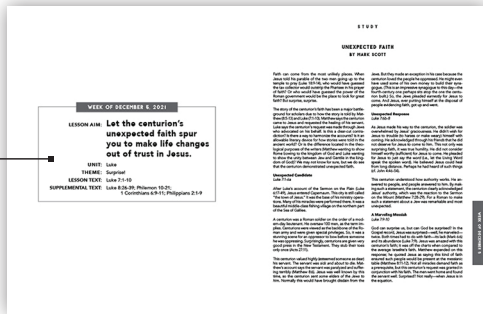
DECEMBER 2021

**Unit: LUKE**  
**Theme: SURPRISE!**

**Overview:** The God of the Bible is a God of surprises. About the time we think we have God figured out, he does a “180” and leaves us with our mouths open. Luke’s Gospel of messianic joy holds surprises for soldiers, disciples, shepherds, religious leaders, and others. The ultimate surprise to the crucifixion may well be the resurrection. Buckle up for a study in Luke about a God who surprises.

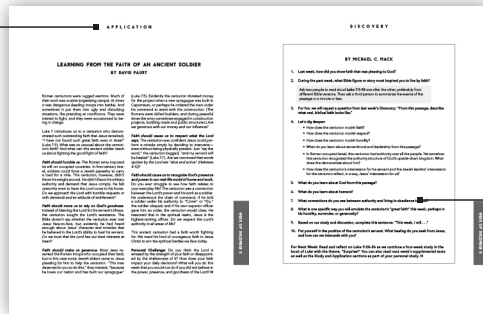
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



**Tabs** indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

**WEEK OF DECEMBER 5, 2021**

**LESSON AIM:** **Let the centurion's unexpected faith spur you to make life changes out of trust in Jesus.**

**UNIT:** Luke

**THEME:** Surprise!

**LESSON TEXT:** Luke 7:1-10

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Luke 8:26-39; Philemon 10-21;  
1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Philippians 2:1-9

## UNEXPECTED FAITH

BY MARK SCOTT

Faith can come from the most unlikely places. When Jesus told his parable of the two men going up to the temple to pray (Luke 18:9-14), who would have guessed the tax collector would outstrip the Pharisee in his prayer of faith? Or who would have guessed the power of the Roman government would be the place to look for great faith? But surprise, surprise.

The story of the centurion's faith has been a major battleground for scholars due to how the story is told by Matthew (8:5-13) and Luke (7:1-10). Matthew says the centurion came to Jesus and requested the healing of his servant. Luke says the centurion's request was made through Jews who advocated on his behalf. Is this a clear-cut contradiction? Is there a way to harmonize the accounts? Is it an allowable literary device for how stories were told in the ancient world? Or is the difference located in the theological purposes of the writers (Matthew wanting to show Rome bowing to the kingdom of God and Luke wanting to show the unity between Jew and Gentile in the kingdom of God)? We may not know for sure, but we do see that the centurion demonstrated unexpected faith.

**Unexpected Candidate**

Luke 7:1-6a

After Luke's account of the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), Jesus *entered Capernaum*. This city is still called "the town of Jesus." It was the base of his ministry operations. Many of his miracles were performed there. It was a beautiful middle-class fishing village on the northern part of the Sea of Galilee.

A centurion was a Roman soldier on the order of a modern-day lieutenant. He oversaw 100 men, as the term implies. Centurions were viewed as the backbone of the Roman army and were given special privileges. So, it was a stunning scene for an oppressor to bow before someone he was oppressing. Surprisingly, centurions are given very good press in the New Testament. They stub their toes only once (Acts 27:11).

This centurion *valued highly* (esteemed someone as dear) his servant. The servant was *sick and about to die*. Matthew's account says the servant was paralyzed and suffering terribly (Matthew 8:6). Jesus was well known by this time, so the centurion *sent some elders of the Jews to him*. Normally this would have brought disdain from the

Jews. But they made an exception in his case because the centurion loved the people he oppressed. He might even have used some of his own money to build their synagogue. (This is an impressive synagogue to this day—the fourth-century one perhaps sits atop the one the centurion built.) So, the Jews *pleaded earnestly* for Jesus to come. And Jesus, ever putting himself at the disposal of people evidencing faith, got up and went.

**Unexpected Response**

Luke 7:6b-8

As Jesus made his way to the centurion, the soldier was overwhelmed by Jesus' graciousness. He didn't wish for Jesus to *trouble* (to harass or make weary) himself with coming. He acknowledged through his *friends* that he did not deserve for Jesus to come to him. This not only was surprising faith, it was true humility. He did not consider himself *worthy* (sufficient) for Jesus to come. He pleaded for Jesus to just say *the word* (i.e., let the Living Word speak the spoken word). He believed Jesus could heal from long distance. Perhaps he had heard of such things (cf. John 4:46-54).

This centurion understood how authority works. He answered to people, and people answered to him. By making such a statement, the centurion clearly acknowledged Jesus' authority, which was the reaction to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:28-29). For a Roman to make such a statement about a Jew was remarkable and most unexpected.

**A Marveling Messiah**

Luke 7:9-10

God can surprise us, but can God be surprised? In the Gospel record, Jesus was surprised—well, he marveled—twice. Both times had to do with faith—its lack (Mark 6:6) and its abundance (Luke 7:9). Jesus was *amazed* with this centurion's faith; it was off the charts when compared to the average Israelite's faith. Matthew expanded on this response; he quoted Jesus as saying this kind of faith ensured such people would be present at the messianic table (Matthew 8:11-12). Not all miracles demand faith as a prerequisite, but this centurion's request was granted in conjunction with his faith. The men went home and found *the servant well*. Surprised? Not really—when Jesus is in the equation. ■

## APPLICATION

### LEARNING FROM THE FAITH OF AN ANCIENT SOLDIER

BY DAVID FAUST

Roman centurions were rugged warriors. Much of their work was routine (organizing camps). At times it was dangerous (leading troops into battle). And sometimes it put them into ugly and disturbing situations, like presiding at crucifixions. They were trained to fight, and they were accustomed to being in charge.

Luke 7 introduces us to a centurion who demonstrated such outstanding faith that Jesus remarked, "I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (Luke 7:9). What was so unusual about the centurion's faith? And what can this ancient soldier teach us about fighting the good fight of faith?

**Faith should humble us.** The Roman army imposed its will on occupied countries. In first-century Israel, soldiers could force a Jewish passerby to carry a load for a mile. This centurion, however, didn't throw his weight around. He didn't flaunt his military authority and demand that Jesus comply. He felt unworthy even to have the Lord come to his home. *Do we approach the Lord with humble requests or with demands and an attitude of entitlement?*

**Faith should move us to rely on God's goodness.** Instead of blaming the Lord for his servant's illness, the centurion sought the Lord's assistance. The Bible doesn't say whether the centurion ever met Jesus face-to-face, but evidently he had heard enough about Jesus' character and miracles that he believed in the Lord's ability to heal his servant. *Do we trust that the Lord has our best interests at heart?*

**Faith should make us generous.** Most Jews resented the Roman troops who occupied their land, but in this case some Jewish elders came to Jesus pleading for him to help the centurion. "This man deserves for you to do this," they insisted, "because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue"

(Luke 7:5). Evidently the centurion donated money for the project when a new synagogue was built in Capernaum, or perhaps he ordered the men under his command to assist with the construction. (The Romans were skilled builders, and during peaceful times the army sometimes engaged in construction projects, building roads and public structures.) *Are we generous with our money and our influence?*

**Faith should cause us to respect what the Lord says.** The centurion was confident Jesus could perform a miracle simply by deciding to intervene—even without being physically present. Just "say the word," the centurion begged, "and my servant will be healed" (Luke 7:7). *Are we convinced that words spoken by the Lord are "alive and active" (Hebrews 4:12)?*

**Faith should cause us to recognize God's presence and power in our real-life world of home and work.** Do you ever struggle to see how faith relates to your everyday life? The centurion saw a connection between the Lord's power and his work as a soldier. He understood the chain of command. If he told a soldier under his authority to "Come" or "Go," the soldier obeyed; and if his own superior officer gave him an order, the centurion would obey. He reasoned that in the spiritual realm, Jesus is the highest-ranking officer. *Do we respect the Lord's authority in all areas of life?*

This ancient centurion had a faith worth fighting for. We need his kind of courageous faith in Jesus Christ to win the spiritual battles we face today.

**Personal Challenge:** Do you think the Lord is amazed by the strength of your faith or disappointed by the shallowness of it? How does your faith impact your daily decisions? What will you do this week that you would not do if you did not believe in the power, presence, and goodness of the Lord? ■

## DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Last week, how did you show faith that was pleasing to God?
2. During the past week, what Bible figure or story most inspired you to live by faith?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 7:1-10** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the events of the passage in a minute or less.

3. For fun, we will repeat a question from last week's Discovery: "From this passage, describe what real, biblical faith looks like."
4. Let's dig deeper:
  - How does the centurion model *faith*?
  - How does the centurion model *respect*?
  - How does the centurion model *humility*?
  - What do you learn about servanthood and leadership from this passage?
  - In Roman-occupied Israel, this centurion had authority over all the people. Yet somehow this centurion recognized the authority structure of God's upside-down kingdom. What does this demonstrate about him?
  - How does the centurion's intercession for his servant and the Jewish leaders' intercession for the centurion reflect, in a way, Jesus' intercession for us?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about humans?
7. What connections do you see between authority and living in obedience to God?
8. What is one specific way you will emulate the centurion's "great faith" this week, perhaps in his humility, surrender, or generosity?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. Put yourself in the position of the centurion's servant. What healing do you seek from Jesus, and how can we intercede with you?

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Luke 9:28-36** as we continue a four-week study in the book of Luke with the theme, "Surprise!" You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖

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