1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Luke, Part 1
Theme: Perfect Humanity

Overview: Jesus is not "practically perfect"—he is perfect in every way. This study from the Gospel of Luke highlights the perfect humanity of Jesus as seen in his compassion, his judgment, his love, and his actions. Students will learn to let their hearts go out to those who are suffering, to remember Jesus' mercy and forgiveness when dealing with troubled people, to follow his example of serving and loving others sacrificially, and to let compassion move them to action, regardless of what other people think.

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.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The Gospel was written by Luke, "the doctor" and traveling companion of Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11). Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, but he "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" and wrote "an orderly account" based on what eyewitnesses handed down (Luke 1:1-4). He later wrote the book of Acts as a second volume (Acts 1:1).

Audience

Luke addressed his Gospel to "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3), possibly a Roman official or patron, so that he might "know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (1:4). Luke's attention to Gentiles, women, the poor, and outsiders made his account especially meaningful to a wide, largely Gentile audience.

Date

Luke's Gospel was written before Acts, which ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome (about AD 62). The Gospel was likely completed around AD 60. The events in this study took place during Jesus' public ministry and at his death and resurrection, about AD 30.

Setting

The lessons follow Jesus from Galilee, where he raised a widow's son at Nain and dined at the home of Simon the Pharisee, through his final journey toward Jerusalem, where he healed on the Sabbath, to the cross and the empty tomb outside Jerusalem.

Theme

Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man who "came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). In his perfect humanity, Jesus showed perfect compassion for the hurting, perfect judgment mixed with mercy, perfect love on the cross, and perfect action that put people's needs ahead of religious rules.

Why Study Luke?

Luke's Gospel shows what it looks like to live as Jesus lived. This study calls believers to be tenderhearted and sympathetic, to extend mercy and forgiveness to broken people, to serve and love others sacrificially, and to let compassion for those who suffer move them to action.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Luke 7:11-23

WEEK 2: Luke 7:36-50

WEEK 3: Luke 23:44-49; 24:1-12

WEEK 4: Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Let your heart go out to those who are suffering; be tender-hearted and sympathetic.**

STUDY: Luke, Part 1

THEME: Perfect Humanity

LESSON TEXT: Luke 7:11-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Peter 3:8; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

PERFECT COMPASSION

BY MARK SCOTT

In the 1964 Walt Disney film, Mary Poppins was "practically perfect in every way." To describe Jesus, we must remove the word *practically* from that description, for he is perfect in every way (i.e., flawless, mature, and complete). A most obvious evidence of Jesus' perfection is his compassion. His heart just goes out to people.

After Jesus concluded his famous Sermon on the Mount, he encountered a Roman soldier. The centurion wanted Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus granted the soldier's request. The centurion stood in stark contrast to the woman in our text. He was a Roman, and she was a Jewess. He was a male, and she was a female. He was the backbone of the Roman army (i.e., important), and she was destitute and disenfranchised. But she needed Jesus' compassion.

Compassion to the Needy

Luke 7:11-17

Luke used the loose temporal phrase *soon afterward* to connect this narrative with the previous one. Jesus was entering the Galilean town of Nain. This small city was in a lush valley southeast of Nazareth and just south of Mount Tabor. Two *large crowds* are mentioned in the text—one with Jesus and one with this woman.

As Jesus entered the town, a funeral procession was leaving it. A woman's *only* (the same word in John 3:16 for "only begotten") son was being carried out. The mother most likely was leading the procession, for that was the custom in Jesus' day. Luke implied much by adding, *and she was a widow*. This "silent one" (the meaning of *widow* in the Old Testament) had lost not only her husband but now her only begotten son as well. Her security, protection, and resources were gone. The large crowd accompanying her indicated many people were touched by her plight.

When Jesus saw her, his *heart went out to her* (felt compassion for her). Her pain was now in Jesus' heart. He told her, "Stop crying" (i.e., the sense in Greek). He knew what he would do (just as when he raised Jairus's daughter and Lazarus). He touched the *bier* (somewhat like a casket). This made Jesus unclean, but he immediately destroyed the evidence of uncleanness by raising the young man from the dead. People must have been shocked.

Jesus actually spoke to the dead man (cf. John 5:25), and the man sat up. The man also began to talk—he probably had lots to say. In a touching phrase, Luke said that Jesus *gave him back to his mother*. What a gift! God had become her husband (Isaiah 54:5), but God gave her boy back to her. No wonder everyone was filled with awe and praised God. With the people's reservoir of Old Testament understanding, they thought a prophet had arisen (Elijah? cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; or Elisha? cf. 2 Kings 4:8-37). The *news* (word, "logos") about this spread like wildfire.

Compassion to the Distraught

Luke 7:18-23

Social media didn't yet exist, but news of this resurrection spread quickly—even 90 miles to the south. John the Baptist was incarcerated in Machaerus (east of the Dead Sea). His *disciples* (i.e., John's followers) told the imprisoned prophet about Jesus' miracles.

John dispatched two of his followers to question Jesus. "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" In other words, "Are you the Messiah?" What could possibly generate such a question? Was John discouraged or depressed? Possibly—his counterpart in the Old Testament got that way (1 Kings 19:1-9). Prison can tear away at one's tenacity. Was he ignorant? Did he just want to know what Jesus was doing? Possibly, for he had no TV in his cell. Or was he distraught? He had predicted a fiery Messiah who would take his winnowing fork and clean the threshing floor (Matthew 3:11-12). Instead, John was told this Messiah was healing everyone. John was hoping for Dwayne Johnson and instead got Fred Rogers.

John knew beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:32-34). But Jesus was bringing in the kingdom differently than John had perceived. When John's disciples asked Jesus the question of his messiahship, Jesus offered up his miracles as proof he was the Messiah. Miracles were acts of war against Satan. Miracles were the fiery judgment on the devil to reclaim God's world. It sounded like Isaiah 35:1-10 to the biblically informed. Jesus congratulated (*blessed*) anyone who would not stumble over his ministry. Jesus clearly was not mad at John—the following context attests to that (Luke 7:24-35). The Messiah just shows compassion differently than one might think.

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WHO CARES?

BY DAVID FAUST

Larry Monroe is president and CEO of Christian Village Communities, which owns and operates two Christ-centered continuing care retirement communities in the Cincinnati area. One day he exited his Mason, Ohio, office and was walking to a meeting, looking focused and intense. As he passed a resident who was being pushed in a wheelchair, he greeted her with a quick and casual hello. Larry recalls,

> *As I walked on by, I clearly heard her say to the person pushing her, "He really doesn't care." I was stopped in my tracks. I quickly caught up with the resident, knelt beside her wheelchair, took her hand, and asked her to forgive me. My casual greeting had demonstrated to her that I did not really see her in the way she needed me to see her.*

Larry says, "I'll forever be grateful for the lesson she taught me that day. She made me a better leader. I now make a greater effort to truly demonstrate that I care as I interact with people."

The Great Differentiator

These days, care is rare. How often do you encounter genuine, unselfish concern for others?

Loveless environments result in lackluster experiences, and an "I don't care" attitude is easy to detect. Have you ever eaten in a restaurant where the servers chat with each other while neglecting the diners? Or shopped in a store where the workers act annoyed if you ask for help? Or attended a party where others ignored you? Or tried to bear a burden too heavy to carry on your own? Or visited a church where no one made any effort to help you feel at home?

The scarcity of kindness creates a huge opportunity for Christians. Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Love is the great differentiator. The norm is, "everyone looks out for their own interests" (Philippians 2:21), so unselfish love will set you apart.

His Heart Went Out to Her

A brokenhearted woman led a funeral procession outside the village of Nain. She was a widow, already dealing with the sad memory of her husband's death. Now it was time to bury another family member—her only son.

Jesus came near to the grieving widow—physically close enough to touch the stretcher where her son's body lay and emotionally close enough to share her sorrow. "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her" (Luke 7:13). After the dead man miraculously came back to life, Luke pointed out tenderly, "Jesus gave him back to his mother" (v. 15).

The hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy" reminds us that the Lord is both "merciful and mighty"—merciful enough to care about our sorrows and mighty enough to raise the dead. The raising of the dead man in Nain foreshadows the final resurrection when the Lord will once again reconnect loved ones separated by death.

The Lord specializes in renewing hope and restoring relationships. Meanwhile, he calls us to enter the physical and emotional space of the sad, the broken, the marginalized, and the overlooked. Will we pay attention and listen—really listen? Will we care for our neighbors, visit the sick, comfort the grieving, and pray for the weak? They will know we are Christians by our love.

Personal Challenge:

How will you demonstrate the compassion of Christ this week? Suggestions: (1) Make a phone call or write an encouraging note to a widow or widower. (2) Visit someone who resides in a senior living facility. (3) Bake cookies and take them to a neighbor who lives alone.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How do you think we as a group did over the past week at serving and sharing with one another?

2. How did last week go in regard to sharing the gospel with people in your circles of influence?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 7:11-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in about a minute or less.

3. What impression of Jesus do you get from this passage?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - Looking at the entire passage, how does Jesus' compassion and care lead to his opportunity to cure?
   - How does his presence lead to a display of his power, which leads to an understanding of his purpose?
   - Compare the widow who lost her son with the imprisoned John the Baptist. How were their situations similar?
   - How were they different?
   - How does Jesus' list of wonders in verse 22 answer John the Baptist's question in verse 20?

5. What do you learn about God through Jesus from this passage?

6. What do you learn about yourself?

7. The apostle Peter said, "Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble" (1 Peter 3:8). What will you do to love others as Jesus did?

8. To whom will you share "what you have seen and heard" about Jesus and his love and power?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What "cure" are you hoping for?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 7:36-50**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Remember Jesus' mercy and forgiveness when dealing with troubled people.**

STUDY: Luke, Part 1

THEME: Perfect Humanity

LESSON TEXT: Luke 7:36-50

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 7:24-35; Luke 6:37

PERFECT JUDGMENT

BY MARK SCOTT

People are broken. Jesus fixes broken people. In fact, when Jesus sees them about to snap in two or their flame of life about to be extinguished, he wraps his spiritual duct tape around the broken area and trims the wick so that the flame burns brightly again (Matthew 12:18-21 quoting Isaiah 42:1-4).

From time to time, something else gets broken (i.e., a person's judgment). Humans are depraved, so their judgment typically is flawed. But divine judgment is always spot-on. On more than one occasion Jesus had to repair flawed human judgments by providing his perfect judgment. That perfect judgment often included mercy—something very much lacking in human judgments.

The Penitent

Luke 7:36-39

We do not know how much time and distance was between Jesus' teaching about John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-35) and this incident with the penitent woman. But somewhere in Jesus' travels (Luke 8:1) this woman came to Jesus in evident repentance. There is no record of Jesus knowing this woman, healing this woman, or teaching this woman. She evidently came to him out of great need. Many roads in life lead to despair. Jesus was this woman's last hope.

This story is similar to when Mary anointed Jesus' feet (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). Some scholars connect the dots and belittle Mary's character—a sort of guilt by association. But the differences outweigh the similarities. This woman is known as the "penitent woman."

The occasion of the narrative was dinner at Simon the Pharisee's house. Table fellowship (i.e., those with whom Jesus ate) was a big theme in Luke's Gospel. In came the unnamed woman. Her reputation was that of a "sinful one" (*lived a sinful life*). This may mean she was morally broken or that she did not give a fig about Pharisaic righteousness. She could easily access Jesus' feet due to him reclining at the table. She poured out her repentance in several ways—weeping (in contrition) over his feet, letting her hair down so she could use her "glory" as a towel (a real social taboo), kissing his feet, and pouring expensive perfume on them.

Simon was chapped, but due to the honor and shame culture of the first century, he did not express his dismay outwardly. Simon's inner thoughts concluded Jesus was no prophet, or else he would not have permitted such an error of righteousness.

The Parable

Luke 7:40-43

The Master Teacher, who had divine insight into the Pharisee's brain, schooled Simon with a three-point parable, with each point representing an allegorical character. The moneylender was God, the one who owed a huge debt was the penitent woman, and the one who owed a small debt was Simon. Neither debtor could pay the moneylender back (a subtle theological affirmation of Romans 3:23).

The parable sounded perfectly normal up to this point. But then, as was the case with so many of Jesus' parables, it broke into fictional analogy when Jesus said the moneylender forgave the debts of both. The word for *forgave* in verse 42 is the verb for "grace." The moneylender "graced" her. No doubt everyone reclining at the table was shocked at such a story. Who would do such a thing? Such extravagant grace.

Simon was invited by Jesus to render his verdict on the story (and thus slice his own throat). Which debtor will love the moneylender more? Simon's answer was on-target—*I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven*. Jesus affirmed Simon's judgment. Intellectually, Simon's judgment was perfect.

The Point

Luke 7:44-50

Sometimes the Master Storyteller left his parables open-ended (Luke 15:32). This was not one of those times. Jesus drove home the point with twenty-twenty vision. Jesus looked at the woman as he taught Simon. His words to Simon were biting, but his look toward the woman was warm and loving. Jesus went back and forth about what Simon did not do—no water for his feet (a common courtesy), no kiss of greeting (think handshake), no oil (to remove the stench of travel)—and what the woman did do—tears, kiss, and perfume.

Verse 47 is the drumroll conclusion. Her sins have been *forgiven* (sent away—a different word than in verse 42). Underneath this declaration is a sad principle—i.e., love for God and others is most often in proportion to one's sense of gratitude for grace. Jesus declared forgiveness to her directly—even before Calvary. The other guests were amazed, but the woman, having given evidence of her faith, walked away saved and in peace. Simon's sense of judgment needed adjustment. Jesus' judgment was perfect.

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WHAT WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON

BY DAVID FAUST

They appeared to have nothing in common at all. People treated him like gold and they treated her like dirt.

Scripture mentions her reputation but not her name, identifying her simply as a "woman in that town who lived a sinful life" (Luke 7:37). Was she a prostitute? Perhaps. Simon, on the other hand, was a well-regarded Pharisee. Their social circles never intersected. Her group of friends never interacted with his, and he meticulously avoided people like her. But when Simon hosted a dinner party with Jesus as a guest, she slipped into the house uninvited.

Jesus' words and deeds that evening moved the woman to cry and moved the Pharisee to criticize (see Luke 7:36-50). The woman wept so hard that her tears poured down on Jesus' feet, and she grabbed the only towel available (her own long hair) to dry them. Spontaneously, she kissed Jesus' feet and poured perfume on them. The Pharisee looked on with disdain, angry at the awkward way this uninvited guest had interrupted his dinner party with all her weeping, wiping, and wailing.

Answering Unspoken Questions

Notice Simon's train of thought and his faulty conclusions. "If this man were a prophet," he said to himself . . . but Jesus was a prophet, and more! "He would know" . . . ah, but he did know! . . . "who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Jesus knew exactly what kind of woman she was. He came to seek, serve, and save people like her. The real problem? Simon didn't realize what kind of Savior Jesus was, nor did Simon recognize what kind of sinner he himself was.

"Jesus answered him" (v. 40), although the Pharisee hadn't spoken his skeptical thoughts out loud. How startled Simon must have been when Jesus directly addressed his unspoken criticisms! The Lord told a little story to illustrate a practical point: Someone who has a large debt canceled appreciates it more than someone who has a small debt canceled. The more we recognize the magnitude of our sin-debt, the more we appreciate God's forgiveness.

Our Common Problem

The unnamed woman and the self-righteous Pharisee had more in common than it appeared, for they were both sinners. And by the end of the evening, Jesus surprised everyone by turning the situation around. The man most viewed as righteous turned out to be the one who failed, and the woman known for her sin was commended for her faith. That evening, Simon hadn't even shown Jesus common courtesies, but the woman honored the Lord by washing and kissing his feet. Forgiven more, she loved more.

This story is a wake-up call when we're tempted to slip into self-righteousness. Without Christ, we are all in the same boat and it's sinking. Some sins are more obvious than others, but we all desperately need God's grace. How will we respond to Christ, the grace-giver? Will we be like cynical Simon, looking down our noses at others and even daring to criticize the Lord himself? Or will we be like the tearful woman, moved to sincere and uninhibited repentance?

This story teaches us to lay aside our pride and fall humbly at Jesus' feet. Only then can we fully appreciate the Master's words: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50).

Personal Challenge:

How much has God forgiven you—a little, or a lot? How deep is your love for the Lord? How much do you appreciate his forgiveness? If you had attended the Pharisee's dinner party, would you have joined the woman at Jesus' feet, or would you have kept your distance and silently found fault?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Over the last several weeks or so, how has God been curing you in some way (physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually)?

2. To whom did you share "what you have seen and heard" about Jesus and his love and power last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 7:36-50** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage quickly and simply.

3. How does Jesus deal with broken people in this passage?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - How would you describe the unnamed woman? What was her reputation? What was her flaw?
   - How would you describe the Pharisee (Simon)? What was his reputation? What was his flaw?
   - What change in Simon's perspective or beliefs was Jesus trying to achieve through his parable and subsequent three comparisons of Simon and the woman?
   - The sinful woman was saved by her faith in Jesus (v. 50). Her outrageous actions (vv. 37-38) that flowed from her "great love" (v. 47) were in response to the great forgiveness she had freely received. How does her story illustrate God's grace?
   - How have you experienced the connection between God's forgiveness and your love for Jesus?

5. What do you learn about God from this passage (especially from Jesus' story about the moneylender)?

6. What do you learn about yourself and others?

7. In response to God's forgiveness, what outrageous action could you take to honor and obey Jesus?

8. How does God's forgiveness compel you to love other people around you?
   - With whom can you share the good news of God's forgiveness this week?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What "broken" area of your life needs mending?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 23:44-49; 24:1-12**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Follow Jesus' example to serve and love others sacrificially.**

STUDY: Luke, Part 1

THEME: Perfect Humanity

LESSON TEXT: Luke 23:44-49; 24:1-12

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 6:27-36; Ephesians 5:1-2

PERFECT LOVE

BY MARK SCOTT

"Holy Week," as it is called, is a demonstration of perfect love. Even while enduring the cross, sustaining the solemnity of the tomb and experiencing the victory of the resurrection, Jesus continued to love and serve others. Jesus cared for his mother (John 19:27) and the repentant thief (Luke 23:43) while on the cross. He obeyed the Sabbath (Luke 23:56) while in the tomb. And on Easter morning, he tenderly spoke Mary Magdalene's name (John 20:16).

The first six verses of our text cover three hours. Jesus had withstood six trials (before Annas, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and then Pilate again). He had been scourged—no small thing. Simon of Cyrene helped him carry his cross to Skull Hill. He wept for the women of Jerusalem, prayed forgiveness over the whole world, and specifically extended pardon to one of the thieves who died at his side. He did all of this before the sixth hour of our text.

Strange Praise on Good Friday

Luke 23:44-49

David said the heavens and skies praise the Lord (Psalm 19:1-6). On this Good Friday, *darkness came over the whole land* until three in the afternoon. Creation knew what was going on. Luke even recorded that *the sun stopped shining*.

The temple knew what was going on. The *curtain* (scholars debate which one—the one at the entrance of the Holy Place or the inner one before the Holy of Holies) was *torn in two*. In a sermon, James S. Stewart said the torn curtain enabled the love of God to be laid bare.

Jesus certainly knew what was going on. His seventh and final statement from the cross was the "now I lay me down to sleep" psalm of the Jews (Psalm 31:5). He committed his spirit to his Father.

Out of the mouth of a Roman centurion—an oppressor of the Jews—came strange praise and a confession. He affirmed that Jesus was a *righteous man*. Matthew and Mark said the centurion called him "the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39). Are these things the same? This soldier had a virgin faith, at best. He probably was affirming more than Jesus being a good guy but doing less than fully embracing Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9). Regardless, this backbone of the Roman army who was in charge of 100 soldiers gave praise to God for Jesus.

Even the rogues in the crowd *beat their breasts*. They understood something big was going on when they witnessed the way Jesus died. Jesus' followers *stood at a distance* and took everything in on this strange day. (The loyal women who had followed him for some time were specifically mentioned—Luke 8:1-3.)

Seeming Nonsense on Easter Sunday

Luke 24:1-12

The resurrection was looked at as comedy (in the classic sense in that the story ends well) during the early centuries of the church. Some still speak of it as a joke on the devil. It does seem nonsensical at first pass. The words of the women—the first witnesses to the resurrection—seemed like *nonsense* to the Jewish men (v. 11; cf. Acts 12:15).

Jesus was buried between 3 and 6 on Friday afternoon. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus hustled to bury him before "taking Sabbath" at 6 p.m. Everyone, including Jesus, rested the next day. *Very early in the morning* (Matthew says "toward dawn," Mark says, "When the sun had risen," and John said, "While it was still dark") on Sunday the women came with *spices* to anoint Jesus' body. This was not embalming (the Jews did not do that). The spices were to honor the loved one and keep the stench down during the early stages of decomposition.

The women found the stone rolled back, Jesus' body gone, and *two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning* (angels) standing by them in the tomb. Jesus did not appear at this point (though Mary Magdalene would circle back to the tomb later, and Jesus would reveal himself to her, John 20:11-18). The angels gave the Easter message to the women: "There is no sense looking for the living among the dead; Jesus is gone because he has risen from the dead as he told you in Galilee; this was all part of God's plan." The women *remembered* this promise.

They went and tried to convince the apostles, but their message was dismissed as *nonsense* (not believable). But Peter ran to the tomb (evidently with John, cf. John 20:3-10) to check out this seeming nonsense. He saw the same "ridiculous fact" . . . there was no one in the tomb.

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WHEN THE CROCUSES BLOOM

BY DAVID FAUST

If you survey a crowd about their favorite flowers, crocuses probably won't make the list. They aren't tall like sunflowers, elegant like orchids, or fragrant like hyacinths and lilacs. Love songs mention roses and lilies, but no songwriter compares his lover to a crocus.

Barely 2 or 3 inches tall, these little flowers grow close to the ground. Their petals bear bright colors (yellow, purple, and white) but they are easy to overlook. A creative arranger might use them as a table decoration, but crocuses are too small to display at a banquet or feature at a wedding or a funeral. I have never seen a groom with a crocus pinned to his lapel or a bride carrying a crocus bouquet.

Last fall, though, I planted three dozen crocus bulbs in flower beds near my house. These little blossoms are some of my favorite flowers because in northern regions, crocuses are one of the first signs of spring. Hardy enough to poke their way through an inch of snow, they break winter's icy grip and brighten the lifeless landscape. When the crocuses bloom, they are a harbinger of better things to come—a first glimpse of warmer days ahead. Soon the grass and trees will turn green, and more spring flowers will appear.

Spiritual Winter

It was early spring when Jesus was nailed to the cross. In the spiritual realm, it had been a long winter—cloudy and dark ever since Adam and Eve ate the garden's forbidden fruit. On that dark afternoon outside Jerusalem, onlookers moved by Jesus' brutal crucifixion "beat their breasts and went away" (Luke 23:48). Others "stood at a distance, watching these things" (v. 49). Still today, many stand at a distance—aware of the cross but choosing not to get too close.

One soldier couldn't stand at a distance. His job was to monitor the proceedings. Hardened by battles and familiar with bloodshed, he stood so close to the cross that he could hear the gasping conversations of the three men being crucified. Two of them were known as thieves and the one in the middle was identified as "King of the Jews." What happened that day, including Jesus' dying words, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (v. 46), moved the centurion to praise God and exclaim, "Surely this was a righteous man" (v. 47).

In biblical times, mourners expressed their grief by tearing their garments. At Jesus' last breath, the heavenly Father reached down and tore the temple curtain in two (v. 45), opening bold new access to his presence. Spiritual spring was coming.

Spiritual Spring

What happens after our hearts stop beating and our lungs stop breathing? Is there more to come after we die? Everyone asks questions like these, but the good news found in Luke 24 changes our perspective and points firmly in the direction of hope with its bold declaration, "He has risen!" (v. 6).

At first even Jesus' disciples didn't grasp this grand miracle. They dismissed initial reports of it as "nonsense" (v. 11). It took solid evidence, including a close-up look at Jesus' hands and feet (vv. 36-40), watching him eat broiled fish (vv. 42-43), and 40 days of "convincing proofs" (Acts 1:3) for them to accept that Jesus truly had risen from the dead.

Like a bright-colored crocus emerging from the icy ground, Jesus' resurrection shows it is possible to survive the spiritual winter. More life and beauty are yet to come.

Personal Challenge:

With a friend or small group, talk about the difference Easter makes in your life. Explain how Jesus' death and resurrection have transformed you from light to darkness and from spiritual "winter" to spiritual "spring."

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What "broken" area of your life has God been mending?

2. In response to God's forgiveness, what outrageous action did you take to honor and obey Jesus last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 23:44-49; 24:1-12** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to retell the passages in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What stands out to you in these passages, perhaps for the first time?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - What did all creation—nature, man-made things, and people—"speak" about the events of the crucifixion and about Jesus?
   - Like the women at the tomb, we are prone to forget. What things or practices help you remember Jesus' sacrifice for us?
   - The people who were present for the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection had different reactions at different times. Some watched from a safe distance (23:49). Some wondered about it (24:4, 12). At least one worshipped (23:47). And several witnessed to what they had seen and heard (24:9-10). In relation to the gospel, how have you experienced any or all these four words (watched, wondered, worshipped, witnessed)?
   - Which one best describes your response to the gospel now?

5. What do you learn about God from these passages?

6. What do you learn about humans?

7. Jesus committed himself into God's hands (23:46). How can you follow the example of Christ in your commitment to him?

8. People who do not yet know Christ tend to be more open around Easter. With whom could you start a discussion about the fact that Jesus was crucified and on the third day was raised again?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. What circumstances will you face this week for which you need God's power?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Let your compassion for those who suffer move you to action, regardless of what other people think.**

STUDY: Luke, Part 1

THEME: Perfect Humanity

LESSON TEXT: Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Isaiah 49:13-16; Ephesians 4:32

PERFECT ACTION

BY MARK SCOTT

A secular proverb says, "Your actions are speaking so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying." Keep in mind that the person who spun that proverb used words to spin it. But who would disagree that wrong actions can undercut right words? Jesus' gospel of love was backed up by his compassionate actions for the hurting. Many of the religious leaders of Jesus' day failed to rejoice when the hurting were helped. The religion police were more interested in procedures than people.

This was especially true in the two miracle stories of our lesson texts. Jesus healed a woman who was crippled for 18 years, but instead of rejoicing, the synagogue leader publicly criticized Jesus and the apostles. Jesus healed a man of dropsy (edema), but the Pharisees remained silent and indifferent. In this travel section of Luke's Gospel (chapters 9–19) we see a loose pattern of sign (miracle) and story (parable or encounter). In between these two miracles are three parables—about the mustard seed, yeast, and the narrow door—as well as a lament over Jerusalem and a rebuke of Herod.

A Crippled Woman Set Free

Luke 13:10-17

Both narratives in our lesson texts occurred on a Sabbath. It is unclear when in Jesus' final months of ministry these events happened. Jesus encountered a crippled woman in the context of his teaching. Luke used an economy of words to tell of her gender, the length and demonic nature of her pain (i.e., she had been *crippled by a spirit*), and the physical condition that made her unable to stand up straight.

Jesus called the woman forward and thus drew some attention to her disability. He spoke the words of liberation, "Woman, you are set free from your *infirmity* (weakness or sickness)." Then he compassionately touched her. The miracle was instantaneous. Luke also recorded that she *praised God*, a typical thing the Gospel writer often would share.

The synagogue leader blew a gasket (*indignant* means to become quickly angry). He viewed healing as a Sabbath violation and dished out his criticism of Jesus and the apostles by speaking to the people. He based his critique on creation (Genesis 2:2). God rested on day seven of creation. Are we to assume healings were taking place outside of Jesus' ministry from his remark, "Come and be healed on those days" or is that assuming too much?

Jesus quickly took the offensive. He labeled those who thought like the synagogue leader as *hypocrites* (play actors). Then he referenced how livestock were taken care of regardless of the day (Exodus 23:4-5; Deuteronomy 22:4). Finally, he vindicated the poor woman, who surely overheard this debate. He referred to her as a *daughter of Abraham* (that meant she was an insider). He acknowledged that her problem was caused by the spirit world (which was something only Jesus could have known). He defended her being liberated on the Sabbath.

The religious police were *humiliated* (overcome or overpowered), but the people (crowd) were *delighted* (filled with joy). One certainly sees from this text the distance between the religious leaders and the people. Did Jesus' perfect action help this desperate woman? Absolutely. Did Jesus care that he had offended the religious leaders? Not so much.

A Man with Dropsy Healed

Luke 14:1-6

The first Sabbath miracle occurred in a synagogue. The second Sabbath miracle occurred in a prominent Pharisee's house. The text said Jesus was being *carefully watched*, which might indicate the suffering man was planted there to be a point of controversy.

The *New International Version* interprets the man's condition by saying he was suffering from *abnormal swelling of his body*. This is known as edema or dropsy. It amounts to "water swelling" (the meaning in the Greek word) in the body. Healing (ultimate rest) can take place on the Sabbath.

Jesus was no doubt burdened by the apathy of the religious elite. Twice in the text the reader's attention is drawn to their indifference. They *remained silent* (v. 4), and they *had nothing to say* (v. 6). Silence was very cruel in this case. Jesus healed this man because of his compassion for the man and also for his anger at the Pharisees. That was why some of Jesus' miracles were actually acts of war. Jesus' arguments in the house and synagogue were similar. The argument could be summed up as "need leads." Perfect action looks more to needs than rules.

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NAILS ON THE ROAD

BY DAVID FAUST

I noticed a rusty nail on the pavement as I walked across a parking lot the other day. The nail was more than an inch long, large enough to puncture a tire. I stooped down and picked it up, hoping to save myself or someone else from getting a flat tire.

It's unnerving to realize how many sharp objects are on the road—screws, nails, bolts, and jagged pieces of metal—that can penetrate a tire. Our cars roll over many of these hazards without harm, but even a small hole in a tire can cause a slow leak or a sudden blowout. A nail on the road can delay our travel plans, or worse, lead to a serious accident.

Eighteen Long Years

The road of life is littered with perils. Often, we manage to glide over the hazards and keep going, but a small nail can lead to a slow leak or a major blowout in our relationship with God.

Consider the plight of the woman Jesus encountered in Luke 13. Like nails on the road, her difficulties sprang from three sources.

The first nail was physical pain. "She was bent over and could not straighten up at all" (Luke 13:11). Back pain can be excruciating, and in those days, there were no orthopedic surgeons, chiropractors, or physical therapists available, nor could she go to a pharmacy and buy pain relievers to ease her discomfort. Her bent-over posture must have affected her state of mind as well. It forced her to keep looking down. Jewish believers customarily lifted their heads and hands in prayer, but this woman couldn't worship that way. It wasn't easy for her to see where she was going, to walk along gazing at a sunny sky, or to look her friends in the eye.

The second nail was demonic oppression. There are different reasons people suffer, but in this case the woman "had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years" (v. 11). Jesus affirmed that Satan had bound her (v. 16), so some sort of spiritual bondage evidently added to her physical pain. Satan brought Job all kinds of trouble. Our adversary tosses nails on the road, using any tools at his disposal to destroy our faith. Peter compared the devil to a roaring lion that prowls around looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

The third nail in this woman's predicament? Enduring years without any relief. Her crippling condition was no temporary malady. According to Jesus, she had suffered for "eighteen *long* years" (v. 16, emphasis mine). Years seem longer than usual when they are filled with suffering. Imagine living with debilitating pain for the length of time it takes a baby to grow into a high school graduate. Eighteen long years indeed.

Hands That Bring Freedom

Jesus used a few short words and the miraculous touch of his hands to bring the woman physical healing, spiritual freedom, and a new perspective on life. After encountering Jesus, "she straightened up and praised God" (v. 13). That's what happens whenever sinners come to the Lord with trusting, repentant hearts. We straighten up and praise God!

On the journey through life, we encounter lots of nails on the road. That's why we need the Lord Jesus as our traveling companion. At the cross he literally took the nails in his own hands.

Personal Challenge:

Jesus' compassion caused him to step outside religious norms to care for those in need. When he did such things, "he was being carefully watched" (Luke 14:1). Others watch us closely, too. They want to know if our faith is real and our love is genuine. They scrutinize our behavior to see whether we are more interested in religious rules than in human needs. What matters more to you: caring for those who hurt, or keeping up appearances?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What circumstances did you face last week for which you needed God's power? How did that go?

2. With whom did you start a discussion about the fact that Jesus was crucified and on the third day was raised again last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to retell the passages in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What contrasts between people's actions and reactions do you see in these passages?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - Describe the woman's experience during the 18 years of her infirmity.
   - What would being "set free" mean for her?
   - How would you characterize the synagogue leader's reaction to Jesus' healing of the woman?
   - How would you characterize the reaction of the Pharisees and teachers of the law to Jesus' healing of the man?
   - How would Jesus' masterful use of logic (13:15-16; 14:5) help his audience understand his point (that is, the value he wanted them to understand)?

5. What do Jesus' heart and actions teach you about God?

6. What do you learn about people?

7. Would you obey God regardless of what people think or say? Why or why not?

8. Choose one of the following "greater than" statements and then share how you would use it as an introduction to tell someone about the application of our Bible study today.
   - Love > Law
   - People > Procedures
   - Relationships > Rules

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. From what would you like Jesus to set you free?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.