

Witnesses to Jesus

Part 1: Ten Studies in Luke 1-9

Picture a scientist going about some great work. He or she is searching for the cure for some horrible disease, or making some marvelous new discovery. First the scientist digs for facts, looking deeply, studying carefully, investigating every clue, relentlessly hunting for any and every fact that will make the discovery deeper, richer, and more accurate.

That is the approach these studies will take with the Gospel of Luke. In these studies we are going to look at Jesus through the eyes of those who actually witnessed him, and then told their story. That is what a witness is: a person who sees or experiences something, then tells others what he or she has seen. In these studies we are going to look at a wide and interesting variety of witnesses-witnesses who have experienced Jesus and share what they have seen. First we'll look deeply at what they say, and then we'll draw our own conclusions.

These studies will use the inductive method, a way of looking into the text for the facts, then pondering what they mean, and then considering what they mean for our situation today. And what could be more important! One of the most profound things in life is to think about God, our relationship with God, and the meaning of life and truth. That is what we will be investigating in these studies as we look at these witnesses of Jesus and what they have to say to us.

Luke's Story

Luke is the author of this Gospel as well as the book of Acts. With these two books he actually wrote one fourth of the New Testament! Luke was the only Gentile New Testament writer and was a man of broad sympathies. He noticed and wrote about groups usually neglected by the cultures of his day: women, children, the sick, the poor, outcasts and foreigners. He points to Jesus' great interest in all kinds of people. Luke was also an educated man, a doctor and a historian. And, like the scientist described above, he was very careful with his facts, describing incidents with historical accuracy and using a rich vocabulary. His reporting is orderly and accurate.

The Gospel of Luke is a fascinating account of Jesus and those who witnessed his life. Luke does not present the facts about Jesus as a statistical report but as a story. He tells in an interesting, accurate and reliable way the story of Jesus and what that story means for us. May God give your small group rich and rewarding insights as you study his Word together!

Notes for the Discussion Leader

You can help your group get the most out of these studies by presenting some guidelines for effective discussion just before you get into the passage. Here are some you can mention:

- Approach the Bible as you would any good primary source: be open to learn.
- Let the text speak for itself rather than depending on something you've heard or read about it.
- Expect the text, rather than the leader, to answer questions that come up.
- Stay in the passage. On occasion, when background information is necessary, the study guide may refer the group to another passage. But that is the only time to go out of the passage. Don't go off on tangents into different passages.
- Stay on the point under discussion.
- Keep in mind that each person's part in the discussion helps the group to learn more. People who talk easily in discussion can provide for quieter people to contribute also. God can use what each one says to help the rest of us. And we can honor each other by listening to each other.
- Begin and end on time.

The second time the group meets, it may be helpful to run lightly over these guidelines again.

The questions in this guide are for your use in preparing and leading. (*Note: helpful leader's notes are in italics throughout the guide.*) Put the questions into your own words if you'd like, yet try to stay within the intent of each question. Become so familiar with the questions that you won't be looking down at your page all the time. Have your own written responses handy as you lead the study. Since the questions are based on the construction of the passage, they will lead the group to major teachings. Decide how much discussion time each group of questions is worth. This will help you pace the discussion.

Make sure that each study ends with one or two questions of application, even if that means watching the clock and leaving out a few of the suggested questions.

Note: It is easier for study and discussion if everyone has the same version of the Bible. The New International Version (NIV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), or New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) are good and popular versions of the Bible and any one of them would be accurate and reliable to use together. The questions in these studies are based on the NRSV text.

Throughout the series of discussions, pray for the members of your group-that they'll be prepared and open for the study-discussion, and that God would speak powerfully to them as they dig into his Word together.

Luke the Investigative Witness

Luke 1:1-4

Getting Started:

Your Story. Before we dig into the Gospel of Luke, it's important to reflect on our own stories in relation to Jesus. All of us, no matter what our backgrounds and experiences, have a story about our knowledge of and relationship with Jesus. Even those of us from non-religious or non-Christian backgrounds have some thoughts and opinions about Jesus. They may be warm, indifferent or angry opinions. That's okay. We want to establish an accepting, open atmosphere where we listen to each other and grow together.

Take some time now to share your own stories or thoughts about Jesus and your relationship with him at this point in your life. (*Note: you can give significant time to this sharing as the rest of this first study is relatively short.*)

1. Turn to Luke's own introduction to his Gospel, Luke 1:1-4. Have someone read the passage as everyone follows along. From these four verses, what do you learn about the Gospel of Luke? What do they tell us about its historical accuracy?
2. Trace through these verses how the "events that were fulfilled among us" came to be written down into "orderly accounts." What process did the writers go through?
3. Who do you think some of these "eyewitnesses" might be? What does Luke say about the others who have written accounts?
4. In verse 3 Luke tells us he wrote to Theophilus. What can we learn about Theophilus from the text? Why did Luke write to him?
5. How do you think Luke's emphasis on talking to eyewitnesses and writing an orderly account will help you as you study his Gospel in the coming weeks?
6. Suppose Luke just came in the door of your room and told you excitedly about his investigation. He's been talking to eyewitnesses about Jesus and putting together an orderly account. What would you like him to investigate, to find out about Jesus? What should he find out from the eyewitnesses? Share some of the questions you come up with, and keep them in mind in the coming weeks to see if Luke gives you any answers.

In Closing:

What is it that you would most like to learn or experience about Jesus in the coming weeks? (*You may want to spend some time in prayer as a group asking Jesus to reveal himself to you in deep and powerful ways.*)

Gabriel: the Heavenly Witness

Luke 1:26-38

Getting Started:

Think of something great. What does "great" mean to you? Share your ideas.

In this passage, a heavenly visitor comes to Mary and proclaims that she will miraculously bear a child, and that he will be great. Let's see what greatness is for Jesus as we delve into this famous passage.

1. Have someone read this text aloud with the rest following along. Verse 26 gives us a "when," a time indicator. Look back to verses 5-24 to find out what happened six months earlier.
2. What do we learn about Joseph in verse 27? Why do you think this might be significant? How is Mary described?
3. How does the angel encourage Mary in verses 28-31? Have you ever experienced God's grace or favor in an unusual way? Talk about it. How did it feel? How did you respond?
4. In verse 32 Gabriel says that Jesus will be "great." Then he describes four things that Jesus will be or have or do. What are they? What do these four things have in common? (*They all have to do with kingship or kingdoms: "Son of the Most High," "give him the throne of . . . David," "reign over the house of Jacob," "of this kingdom there will be no end."*)
5. Our concept of kingship these days is pretty shallow, mostly centering around the foibles of the British royal family or a certain king buried in Graceland. What power did kings have in the ancient world? What would it mean to have a king whose kingdom would never end?
6. What does it mean for us today that Jesus is a king, an eternal king, whose kingdom will never end? Where do you think his kingdom is today? How might this change or enlarge your concept of Jesus? How does it honestly make you feel about him?
7. What progression do you see in Mary's responses in verses 29, 34, and 38? How does Gabriel answer her question about how this could happen (verses 35-37)? Have you ever experienced going from confusion to questioning to faith? What was the situation?
8. What do you think the angel's statement in verse 37 meant for Mary? What could it mean for you today?

In Closing:

In this story, Gabriel gives an announcement, a Word from God, and describes Jesus as the great King. Mary responds, after some perplexity and questioning, with faith in this Word. What does it mean for you to live by faith in the Word? What would this faith look like? What practical small step of faith could you take this week, based on God's Word?

Angels and Shepherds: Joyful Witnesses

Luke 2:1-20

Getting Started:

When have you experienced good news? Think of a time you received good news and share a little about it. In this passage we will read about some good news brought by heavenly messengers to some unlikely witnesses. We'll ponder what it means that Jesus is "good news."

1. Have three people read the passage, one for each paragraph (the paragraphs are vs. 1-7; 8-14; 15-20). *(Note: for some in the group, even the first few words ["In those days a decree went out . . ."] may bring back memories of trees, lights, presents, or a midnight mass or service with the family. But a key to inductive Bible study is to approach the text in a fresh way as if one had never seen it before. This may be hard, but urge the group to try.)*
2. In the first few verses, what are some clues that the historian Luke is trying to be painfully accurate with his political and historical facts? Why do you think he mentions Roman emperors and governors-people of power?
3. In verses 4-7, what new things do we learn about Joseph and Mary? What facts about them are repeated from our study in Luke 1:26-38? Put yourself in the drama. How would you feel, trudging over a hundred miles because some occupation government officials wanted you to register so they could tax you and, if you are a man, possibly draft you into their army? Look again at verse 7. What different emotions might Joseph and Mary have experienced?
4. Shepherds were poor, lower-class people in their society, despised by religious Jews because their work kept them away from many religious activities. Looking at verses 8-14, why do you think God chose shepherds to be the first ones to hear the good news of the birth of Jesus?
5. In verse 10, the angel talks about "good news of great joy for all people." Look carefully at the three ways Jesus is described in verse 11. What are they? (*Savior, Messiah [or Christ], Lord.*) What would each of these have meant for poor Jewish shepherds under Roman occupation in the first century? Take time to ponder what each description means to us today. Why is this announcement by the angel good news?
6. Notice the contrast between these majestic titles for Jesus and the poor situation into which he was born in verses 6-7. Why do you think Luke emphasizes this contrast?
7. What is the reaction in heaven to the birth of Jesus according to verses 13-14? What is a benefit to those on earth? "On earth peace among those whom he favors" is a different translation from the one in our traditional Christmas carols, but it is more accurate. What do you think it means?
8. After the angels leave, in verses 15-16, what do the shepherds do? What have they become? (*Witnesses!-Someone who sees and then tells.*)
9. What is the shepherds' first act after seeing and experiencing Jesus (verse 17)? Think back to the time when you experienced good news in your life. Did you want to tell others about the good thing? If we truly experience Jesus in our lives, and thus become "witnesses" to his truth as the shepherds were, how might we respond?

In closing:

Again, put yourself into the passage. What feelings do you think Mary experienced in this passage? What feelings did the shepherds experience? Note that the shepherds left glorifying and praising God (verse 20). Is there anything in your life or experience right now for which you can praise God? Is there anything you are thankful for? *(Note: you may want to end the study by sharing some things each person is thankful for, and then spending time in prayer praising and thanking God.)*

Simeon and Anna: Patient and Faithful Witnesses

Luke 2:22-40

Getting started:

What do you want to be like at the end of your life? What do you want to have accomplished? You may not have done a lot of thinking about this, but take a few moments to share some preliminary thoughts.

In this study we are going to look at two older people whose lives ended well. They seemed to know how to live life with power and meaning. Let's look at their "witness" to Jesus.

1. Have someone (or a few people) read Luke 2: 22-40 aloud. Verses 22-35 are about Simeon, verses 36-40 about Anna.
2. Verses 1-21 of this chapter describe the birth and circumcision of Jesus. Now it is time for his "presentation." How is this ceremony described in verses 22-24? Leviticus 12:6-8 in the Old Testament describes the origin of this purification ceremony. From the Leviticus passage and verse 24 we get a clue to the economic status of Mary and Joseph. What was it?
3. Look carefully at how Simeon is described in verse 25. Do you know anyone like this, who seems to have "the Holy Spirit resting on" them? Share a bit about them. What makes them special?
4. How do you think Simeon felt when he saw Jesus?
5. Now look at his "song" in verses 29-32. What does he say about the salvation that is brought by Jesus? Who were the "Gentiles?" (*Everyone who was not Jewish.*) If this "light of revelation" that Jesus will bring is for the Gentiles, and also for the glory of Israel, what is Simeon really saying about the revelation of Jesus?
6. Look at Simeon's further prophesy in verses 34-35. Why do you think there will be opposition to someone bringing the revelation of God? What do you think he meant when he said to Mary that "a sword will pierce your own soul"?
7. How is Anna described in verses 36-37? Do you know any older people who are very godly, who seem to worship God with genuine power? Share a bit about them.
8. In verse 38, as soon as Anna saw Jesus, what are two things she does immediately in response? How is this similar to the shepherds' response in verses 17 and 20? What seems to be the first thing people do when they truly encounter Jesus? Have you encountered Jesus in such a way that would make you want to tell others about him?
9. Compare Simon and Anna. What did they have in common? What was their response to encountering Jesus?

In closing:

What characterizes those who genuinely seek Jesus? What do they seem to do as soon as they encounter him? How do the examples of these two people help you as you think about living your life, and ending your life, meaningfully?

John the Baptist: the Fiery Witness

Luke 3:1-20

Getting started:

Think for a minute about fire. Have you ever experienced a fire? What good things does fire do? What harmful things does it do?

The Gospel of Luke is set in the first century. The nation of Israel is living under the heavy hand of Rome and is rife with internal difficulties as well. A man appears on the scene whose life affects many people. He is a fiery man, and he speaks of fire in many different ways. This man is of such character and influence that some think he may be the Messiah. He is not. But he is a significant person in the history of Christianity. His name is John.

1. Ask everyone to read Luke 3:1-20 for themselves, and then have the group members mention things that impress them about John's ministry.
2. As you look more closely at the first two verses, what do they contribute to the passage? Why do you think Luke includes this kind of information? History shows that Herod and some of the other people listed here were known to be morally and spiritually degenerate. What is the source of their authority as leaders? How does it compare with John's?
3. We're introduced to John's work in verse three. What was it? What does it mean to repent? (*To repent means to be genuinely sorry for sin and to turn from it to obey God resolutely. Sin means living independently of God, failing to trust him. It is more than just bad morals.*) When people came to be baptized by John, they confessed their sin and made a "U-turn" toward God. John then baptized them. Therefore, what did John's baptism mean? (*When John baptized people, this symbolized a radical cleansing of their lives and desire to change direction and turn towards God in faith and trust.*)
4. In verses 4-6, Luke quotes from the prophet Isaiah to help us understand more about John's ministry. Look carefully at the picture Isaiah paints and dig out the facts there. What do you think this is describing? (*This is a picture of a middle-eastern king and his herald. In those days, when a ruler took a journey, a servant or herald was sent ahead of him. This herald warned the people of the land to prepare the roadway through the wilderness for the arrival of the king. Holes in the road had to be filled, bumps and high places leveled, crooked sections straightened and rough spots smoothed.*) How is John a herald for "King" Jesus? What did it mean for John to make crooked places straight and the rough ones smooth? What does this have to do with "repentance"?
5. The next paragraph, verses 7-9, tells us that a great number of people are coming to John for baptism. How does the text explain why John is so stern with them? What would be a contemporary way of saying, "I'm okay. I have Abraham as my father"? How does John confront this kind of complacency?
6. As you look at the dialog in verses 10-14, what do you find out about these people? What are they like in everyday life? What is John emphasizing about genuine repentance? (*It has a practical, social context- repentance has to do with social justice!*) What would practical repentance look like for us today?
7. According to verse 15, what is the atmosphere of the crowd and the situation? From verses 15-17, what do you learn about John?
8. What does John make clear about Christ in verses 15-17? What is surprising about this picture of the Messiah? How do you respond to this? How would the baptism by Jesus be different from the baptism by John? How would its effects be different in your everyday life? (*The baptism by John was only preparatory. The baptism by Jesus is real, permanent, and has the powerful meaning that the Holy Spirit is truly there-that God is with us and in us.*)
9. In verse 18 John's preaching is called good news. How is this word of a coming judge who will baptize with fire good news? How did he respond to this and other things John said?
10. According to John's fiery witness, who is Jesus? What do you think of the Jesus presented here, and in Luke so far?

In closing:

John the Baptist talked about making the crooked straight and rough places smooth. What might be some "crooked" or "rough" places in your life? What would repentance mean to you in light of this study? What would it mean for you to repent in this way?

The Witness of Scripture

Luke 4:16-30

Getting Started:

What do you really think of the Bible? What is it to you? Is it a mysterious holy book? A book only priests or scholars can interpret? Is it a bunch of myths? Good moral teaching? Just the words of people? The Word of God? (Note: you can have a lively discussion if people share honestly!)

In this study we are going to see Jesus' attitude toward the Bible of his day-what we call the Old Testament. We'll see how he took it as an authoritative witness to himself and gave his audience a radical twist on its interpretation.

1. Review the section that comes just before our passage, the story of the temptation of Jesus and how he defeated Satan by quoting from Scripture. Then have someone or a few people read the study passage, Luke 4:16-30.
2. Take some time to share all the facts you see in verses 16-17. What is the special designation given to Nazareth? What do these verses imply about Jesus' attendance at synagogue services?
3. The tradition in the synagogues of Jesus' day was not to have a regular minister/preacher for each synagogue, but rather to have the Scripture read and discussed. Often a distinguished visitor was asked to read the Scripture and comment on it. Why do you think Luke put such an emphasis on Jesus' reading of this Scripture in Isaiah?
4. The Scripture Jesus read, verses 18-19, is a quote from Isaiah 61:1-2. As Jesus applies this to himself, what was he anointed by the Spirit to do? Who are the four groups of people mentioned here? What do they all have in common? Look carefully at each one and ponder what it means:
 - a. What is the good news that is going to the poor?
 - b. Who are the captives that will be released? What do you think this meant for the people of that time? What does it mean for us in our time?
 - c. Who are the blind, then and now?
 - d. Who are the oppressed, then and now? What would freedom mean for them?
5. Verse 19 is a quote from Isaiah but also alludes to Leviticus 25:10, which describes the Year of Jubilee, an every-fifty-year festival of freedom, worship and economic justice. What do you think the "year of the Lord's favor" is that Jesus is going to proclaim?
6. Looking again at verses 18-19 as a whole, how is Jesus defining his mission? Why do you think he stresses that the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed will be the focus of his ministry? What does this say to people who feel that the purpose of Christians is to "save souls" and not worry about social needs?
7. After the reading, Jesus applies it all to himself. What is he saying in his one-sentence sermon in verse 21?
8. How do his hearers respond in verse 22? Jesus then confronts them with some very sharp words. In verses 23-24, what is Jesus saying about the people's real response to him, in their hearts, underneath their kind words? What does this say about our response to him?
9. In verses 25-27, Jesus is referring to two Old Testament stories (1 Kings 17:1-24 and 2 Kings 5:1-14) that would be familiar to the people then but are not so familiar to us. Look closely at the two people who receive ministry: the widow at Zarephath in Sidon in verse 26, and Naaman the Syrian leper in verse 27. What do they have in common? (*They were both Gentiles.*) Does this give you a clue as to why Jesus' Jewish hometown listeners were so mad? The Jewish people at the time felt that they were the special objects of God's love. What does this say about the scope of God's love? In verses 18-19 and 25-27, for whom does God seem to have a special preference?
10. Jesus took very seriously the authority of the Scripture of his day, and its witness to him. What did the combined witness of all of the Old Testament Scriptures mentioned in this passage say about Jesus? Who is he, and what is his mission? What in this passage was surprising or intriguing for you? Why?

In closing:

How does the emphasis on Jesus' love for sinners, the outcast and the blind apply to you? What does it say about the priorities his people should operate by? Who are the poor, captive, blind or oppressed people on your campus or living near you? What can your group do to show Jesus' love to them?

Simon Peter, a Humbled Witness

Luke 5:1-11

Getting Started:

In what areas of your life do you feel confident or experienced or affirmed by others? In what part of your life do you think you can handle things fairly well by yourself?

In this study we will look at a person who was a true professional, someone who could handle things by himself-and yet who, in the context of his profession, learned some amazing things about Jesus.

1. Ask someone who enjoys reading to read the passage aloud-and dramatically. Everyone else should follow along and notice as much as they can about the scene.
2. As you look at the first five verses, put yourself in the scene. Pretend this is a movie. Who is there? What sounds do you hear? What do you smell? What are your visual impressions? (*Note: Simon [also called Simon Peter and later just Peter], James, and John have known Jesus for a year, but are not yet his disciples. The Lake of Gennesaret is another name for the Lake of Galilee, a harp-shaped lake 13 miles long and 6-7 miles across, circled by gently rolling hills.*)
3. Why do you think Jesus gets into the boat? (*Open water is a natural amplifier for sound.*)
4. In verse 4, how does the scene change? If you were Simon, how would you be feeling? What would be on your mind? Consider what Jesus says to him in verse 4. What difficulties would an experienced fisherman have with this suggestion? (*Night is often the best time for fishing and shallow areas are the best places.*) What do you notice in Simon's response in verse 5? What feelings and conflicts is Peter expressing?
5. Look at verses 6-7. What words and phrases in these verses indicate the size of the catch? Why is the size of the catch significant?
6. What is Simon's reaction in verse 8? Is this what you would expect? From his reaction, what do you think he perceives about Jesus? What does he perceive about himself? Why do you think he says he is a sinful man? Why is this an especially strong experience for Simon (being a fisherman)? What does his response say about who Jesus is? What does this say about who we are?
7. What might Jesus be saying to you about an area of your life where you feel confident, or perhaps over-confident? What might he be saying to you about what trust in him means, or what faith is?
8. Notice the way Jesus responds to Simon in verse 10. How might he have responded? "You will be catching people" (King James version: "I will make you fishers of men") is a famous phrase. What do you think it meant to Simon Peter? What does it mean for you? Why does Jesus say this to Simon now, rather than saying it earlier?
9. James and John have watched this whole thing. What might have gone through their minds as Jesus made the suggestion to Simon about putting out into the deep?
10. How does the story end, in verse 11? If you had been one of these three fishermen, what characteristics of Jesus would have led you to leave everything to follow him? What do they learn in this experience that they'll need in the work they'll be doing from now on?

In Closing:

What does it really mean to follow Jesus? How has Jesus shown his trustworthiness to be followed? What did it mean for Peter, James, and John? What does it mean for you? Is there anything holding you back from freely following Jesus?

Or, summarize Simon's story (learning of Jesus, being skeptical of his command, following his Word, seeing power demonstrated, repenting, being called to deeper service). In what ways are these elements present in our stories-our spiritual journeys?

The Roman Centurion: a Gentile Witness

Luke 7:1-10

Getting Started:

Faith is a word that we hear a lot. How would you define it? In this study we are going to take a fresh look at what faith is, and what faith in Jesus means in a practical way, through the witness of a Roman soldier. The setting is the Jewish town of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has just finished teaching about practical obedience (6:46-49). He is now interacting with a person in a crisis.

1. Have someone read aloud Luke 7:1-10. Ask the group to be noticing the different kinds of people involved in this experience.
2. Looking at the first five verses, what is interesting about how the centurion approaches Jesus?
3. This centurion is part of the Roman occupation army in Israel at the time. He had authority over 100 men. How do the people in an occupied country usually feel about the occupying army? How is this centurion unusual? Why do you think he would ask for help from Jesus? Why would he involve elders of the Jews?
4. Which words and phrases in verses 4 and 5 indicate the regard of the Jewish leaders for the centurion? Why do you think Jesus goes with them?
5. Consider the centurion's request in verse 3. Then look at his request in verses 6 and 7. What is the difference in the two requests? Why do you think he changes what he asks?
6. Why do you think there is a contrast between the elders' view of the centurion, verse 4, and the centurion's view of himself, verse 6? How is he showing trust in Jesus in verse 7?
7. Contrast the authority of the centurion and Jesus in terms of origin and extent (verses 7 and 8).
8. In what ways does Jesus respond to the centurion's faith in him? How are the different people in this account affected by Jesus' response?
9. What evidences of true faith do you find in the centurion, from the start of the passage on through? What does this true faith look like in this passage? How is it expressed?

In Closing:

What are some ways we can show true, practical faith in Jesus' care and authority? What can we trust him for this week, and how can we demonstrate our trust?

Looking back over the studies we have done so far, how has your view of who Jesus is and what it means to have faith in him grown or changed?

The Forgiven Woman: a Loving Witness

Luke 7:36-50

Getting Started:

Tell about a time in your life when you were incredibly thankful and relieved.

Jesus has been performing great miracles before the people, and teaching with great authority. One day, he accepts a dinner invitation into an astute citizen's household, and surprising things happen!

1. Have someone read Luke 7:36-50. In verses 36-39, how is the woman described? Look carefully at what she does. What different emotions does she express here? How do you think she feels about herself? What would motivate this woman to crash a dinner party, bring this expensive gift and weep before Jesus?
2. What might we learn here about approaching Jesus?
3. In verse 39, how does Simon, the host, react to this uninvited guest? How do you think he feels about himself? How does he feel about Jesus? (Notice also the deference he gives Jesus in verse 40.)
4. Jesus responds to Simon with a story in verses 40-43. Notice all the facts. What is the point of the story? What is the significance of the creditor's canceling the debts?
5. Notice the interesting turn that Jesus takes toward Simon in verses 44-47. How is Simon different from the woman? How is she better than he? Who do you think is the worse sinner here, the woman or Simon? (*Note: this is not an easily answered question. There should be quite a bit of discussion since there are good arguments on both sides.*)
6. In verse 47, what is the response that Jesus wants in those whom he forgives? Do you think this characterizes the lives of those who are believers in Jesus, forgiven by him? Does it characterize your life?
7. What is significant about Jesus' words in verse 48? Since only God can forgive sins, and Jesus forgave sins, what is he saying about himself? How do the guests respond (verse 49)?
8. How do you think the woman felt in verse 50? How has she shown faith? According to the witness of this woman, what is true faith in Jesus?
9. With which person in this story do you most identify, and why?

In closing:

Go over again the woman's steps to commitment and faith (*deep repentance, love for Jesus, unabashed and almost wasteful commitment to him, faith put in him, sins forgiven*). Have you ever made a deep commitment of faith in Jesus like this woman? What would prevent you from doing that?

Or, many students have difficulty believing that Jesus really loves them. If you are in that situation, what barriers do you feel are hindering you from accepting Jesus' love? Perhaps pride like Simon's? Or perhaps fear, or broken trust? What would help you to begin breaking through these barriers and accepting the love Jesus has for you? (Offer the group some extra time to think through these issues. Allow those who wish to share their thoughts to do so.)

Or, the response that Jesus wants from those he forgives is love (verse 47). What would it mean for you to love Jesus the way this woman did? Does this love characterize your life? Your group's life? How can you demonstrate love this week?

The Witness of Peter and the Disciples

Luke 9:18-27

Getting Started:

Picture yourself before a really big exam. What do you feel like? What is going on in your head?

Jesus had been ministering with his disciples for a few years. They had seen his mighty acts, heard his powerful words. Now it is time for the big test. Would they know and understand who he really is? Would they present a proper "witness" of what they had seen and heard? This passage is a hinge point in Luke. After this he "sets his face toward Jerusalem" where he knows he will die (verse 51).

1. Have someone read Luke 9: 18-27. In verse 18, what does Jesus ask to get the disciples thinking? Why do you think he asked a general question before his next very personal and very specific question in verse 20?
2. Why do you think people would have thought Jesus was John the Baptist? How would he have reminded people of Elijah? Why do they think they thought that in Jesus one of the ancient prophets had arisen?
3. Look at Peter's answer in verse 20. What do you think his own words meant to him? What do they mean for us today?
4. Since Peter answered the question correctly, one would assume Jesus would breathe a sigh of relief and then commend Peter and the other disciples. But what does Jesus do in verse 21? Why do you think he did this? How does the fact that he must suffer, be rejected, be killed and rise again explain why the disciples couldn't tell the world that he is the Messiah at that point? (*Remember that he still had a year or so of ministry to go.*)
5. Verses 23-26 are a profound summary of what it means to be a follower of Jesus—a disciple, one who learns from a teacher. What are three things in verse 23 that one must do to become his follower? What do each of these mean for us today?
6. What do you think Jesus means by "lose their life for my sake" in verses 24-25? How does this "save" our lives?
7. What does he not want his followers to be, in verse 26? What would be the positive opposite of being ashamed of him? Have you had opportunities recently to share what you have experienced of him? How have you felt about the witness that you shared?
8. The exact meaning of verse 27 is controversial. What do you think he meant by "seeing the kingdom of God?" (*Some scholars think that the next incident, the Transfiguration, helps fulfill this promise as does his resurrection, the Spirit coming at Pentecost, etc.*)
9. From this passage, what does it mean for you to be a follower of Jesus?

In Closing - a Review:

During our ten weeks of study, we have looked at a number of "witnesses" to Jesus, each of whom told us something about him. That is what a witness is, someone who has seen something and then tells what they have seen or encountered. Quickly review each of the witnesses (*perhaps write them on a chalkboard, overhead, or easel*) and consider what they said about Jesus. What did they have in common, and how were they different?

Who was your favorite witness, and why?

How have you grown and changed in your knowledge of and relationship to Jesus during this time? What impresses you about him? How have you experienced him during these studies? How are you going to respond?

"Witnesses to Jesus" Bible Studies are available on the Internet at <http://www.gospelcom.net/iv/> or in print form from: InterVarsity Training Dept., P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895 or call 608/274-9001 and ask for the Training Department.

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