

Witnesses to Jesus

Part 2: Ten Studies in Luke 10-24

This is the second in a series of three small-group Bible study discussion guides (Luke 1-9, Luke 10-24 and selected portions of Acts) which explore the meaning of "witness." These are designed to accomplish two purposes. One is simply to strengthen believers as witnesses to the work and life of Jesus, both in history and in their lives. The second is to serve as preparation for URBANA® 96. The Gospel of Luke is a fascinating account of Jesus and those who witnessed his life. Luke tells the story of Jesus--and what that story means for us--in an interesting, accurate and reliable way. May God give your small group rich and rewarding insights as you study his Word together!

Notes for the Discussion Leader

These guides look at Jesus through the eyes of those who actually witnessed him, and then told their story. The studies 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.

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 to suggest:

- Approach the Bible ready to learn.
- Let the text speak for itself rather than depending on outside opinion.
- Expect the text to answer questions, rather than the leader.
- Stay in the passage and on the point under discussion. Sometimes the study guide will take you to another passage for background, but try to avoid "tangents" that take your group away from the main passage.
- Listen to each other and urge quieter people to share their thoughts.
- Begin and end on time.

The questions in this guide are for your use in preparing and leading. (*Note: Helpful leader's notes are in italics throughout the guide.*) Make the questions your own, and become familiar with them so that you won't have to look down at your page all the time. Have your own written responses handy as you lead the study. You can set a good pace for your discussion by deciding how much discussion time each group of questions is worth. Leave time for the application questions at the end of each study.

It is easier for study and discussion if everyone has the same version of the Bible. The questions in these studies are based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) text. The New International Version (NIV) or the New American Standard Bible (NASB) are other popular versions of the Bible that your group may wish to use.

The Seventy: Witnesses on a Mission

LUKE 10:1-24, by John Seiders

Getting Started:

Picture yourself ready to go on a mission trip with your church or fellowship. Why would you go? How would you prepare? What would you say to those whom you'd meet?

In this passage, Jesus is on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem and has just taught about true discipleship and the kingdom of God. Some of those who heard him and want to follow him are about to be sent out on a mission. In this study we'll explore what it is like to be a witness sent on a mission.

1. Read Luke 10:1-24. In verses 1-12, what do we learn about the seventy followers and the purpose of their mission? How are they to prepare? What is their message? How will their needs be met? (*Note: Some ancient authorities read "seventy-two." Whatever the number, the point is that they were sent ahead of Jesus.*)
2. What do you think Jesus means in verse 3 when he says that he sends them out "like lambs in the midst of wolves?" How can you relate to this metaphor? What are your feelings as you seek to be a witness on campus?
3. In verses 3-7, what is Jesus trying to teach about being witnesses?
4. What does "the kingdom of God" mean in verses 9 and 11? How is it that the kingdom of God comes near? (*Note: The kingdom is the reign or rule of God in the lives of people.*)
5. In verses 10-12 and 13-16, Jesus speaks of rejection. How are these seventy to deal with the rejection they will receive? What or whom are these inhospitable people ultimately rejecting?
6. Verses 17-20 recount the return of those who were sent out. How do they describe their mission experience? What are they excited about? How does Jesus respond to their report?
7. What is to be the source of the disciples' joy? Why? What is the source of Jesus' joy (*verses 21-22*)? How do we come to know the Father?
8. In a private word to the disciples (*verses 23-24*), Jesus talks about what they have seen and heard. They were witnesses. What did they see and hear?

In Closing:

In what situations is Jesus calling you to bear witness to the nearness of the kingdom of God? What will it mean for you to respond to his call? In what can you rejoice?

Authentic and Hypocritical Witnesses

LUKE 11:53--12:11, by Jean Duerbeck

Getting started:

You've heard it said, "Churches are full of hypocrites." Why is this accusation so common? Could someone accuse you of being hypocritical?

Earlier in Luke 11, Jesus upbraided the Pharisees and experts in the Law for their callous and self-centered attitudes, saying they are actually opposing, rather than serving, God. The battle lines are drawn as our passage begins.

1. Read Luke 11:53--12:12. Verses 53-54 set the tone for this passage. What words indicate how the Pharisees and teachers feel about Jesus? Describe the scene 12:1. (*Note: It was dangerous to gather large crowds during this period of Roman occupation.*)
2. Jesus first warns about the Pharisees. What is "hypocrisy"? How is their hypocrisy like yeast?
3. Find the contrasts in verses 2-3. What is Jesus saying about secretive acts? Who is the "you" of verse 3? How might these people--and we ourselves--feel about personal secrets being revealed?
4. Next Jesus teaches about fear (*verses 4-5*). According to Jesus, who is the only one worthy of fear? Why? What do verses 6-7 add about God's character, authority, and care? (*Note: Sparrows were cheap food for the poor.*)
5. According to verses 8-12, what does Jesus promise to those who "acknowledge" him before others? What does it mean to you to acknowledge Jesus before others? How is this being a "witness"?
6. What might cause a person to deny Jesus before others (*verse 9*)?
7. Verse 10 indicates that there is forgiveness for those who may speak against Jesus, yet not for those who "blaspheme against the Holy Spirit." What is the difference? (*Note: To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit does not mean, as some students fear, a single act of sin or letting a bad word or two about the Holy Spirit slip out. It means consistently denying the Holy Spirit's power working in Jesus [see Luke 11:15-16 for an example of this]. It means to say an eternal "no!" to Jesus, to deny that he is Lord, Savior and God. By definition, a believer committed to Jesus as Lord, Savior and God in daily life has not committed this blasphemy.*)
8. This section indicates that successive generations of believers in Jesus will inherit the battle against hypocritical authorities. What does Jesus promise when we are forced to be witnesses before rulers and authorities? What is our responsibility?

In closing:

Who are the rulers and authorities in your daily life? Describe a situation you are in right now in which you must acknowledge Jesus before others. How might you handle it? Take time to pray for one another.

The Prodigal Son: Witness as Story

LUKE 15:1-2; 11-32, by Bob Grahmann

Getting started:

Think of a time when someone extended "grace" to you: they could have blamed you or shamed you but they didn't. They gave you love and understanding when you deserved something else. How did it feel? This is the story of a father's grace which witnesses to God's grace in Jesus.

1. Read the passage aloud. Take a look at verses 1-2, which set the scene for all the stories in the chapter. What is Jesus doing, and why are the "Pharisees and teachers of the law" upset about it? How do they show their disgust? ("*Grumbling.*")
2. In answer to their grumbling, Jesus tells three stories about people or things that are lost and then found, and about the joy that comes when one sinner repents. We are going to look at the third story, about a father and his son, starting at verse 11.
3. In verses 11-12, what does the young son ask for? How does he ask? (*Demandingly! Note: Scholars say that asking for one's inheritance before one's father has died was unusual in that society, and was quite arrogant and rude.*)
4. How does the father respond in verse 12b? How do you think he feels?
5. Now look at the description of the son's adventures in verses 13-16. What words in that paragraph describe the fact that he is really a "sinner"? (*Note the words "squandered," "dissolute [wild, riotous] living," "feeding pigs." Look also at verse 30.*) For a Jewish person, what is especially sinful and disgusting about what he does in verses 15-16? (*Pigs were "unclean" animals, and God had forbidden the Jews to eat pork.*) According to verse 16, what effect is the son's wasteful, sinful lifestyle finally having on him?
6. In verses 17-20, what words and phrases describe what "repentance" is for this young man? (*"He came to himself" [or, "he came to his senses"]; a verbal acknowledgment of his sin in verse 18; an awareness of his unworthiness in verse 19; "set off and went" in verse 20.*) How do your observations describe what true repentance is? (*Seeing one's sin, seeing one's unworthiness, confessing sin, turning away from sin.*)
7. Look at the father's reaction in verse 20. What clues do you find that show the father has been waiting for his son's return? (*"But while he was still far off, his father saw him . . ."*) In verses 20-24, what strong, emotional words do you see that describe an extravagant welcome? What did the son do to deserve such a wonderful welcome? Why did the father welcome him like this?
8. Jesus' answer to the grumbling Pharisees and teachers is found in verses 25-32. In some ways the older brother in this story represents them. How does the older brother respond to this wonderful, undeserved welcome? What does the father say in return? Along with verses 7 and 10, how is this an answer from Jesus to the Pharisees who opposed his welcoming of sinners?

In Closing:

Think again about the loving father. How does he show God's grace? (*Watching for His son to come back, throwing his arms around him in welcoming love, asking for nothing in return in order to earn or keep his love.*) Put yourself in the son's place. How does it feel to have the heavenly Father hugging you, enclosing you in his loving arms, even though you don't deserve it?

The Blind Man: a Grateful Witness

LUKE 18:35-43, by Al and Sue Anderson

Getting Started:

Have you ever received a product or service so good that you enjoyed telling people about it and encouraged them to get it, too? Think about your favorite movie, book, restaurant or music, or your most enjoyable vacation. Think of places where you have received excellent service. Part of the joy you receive comes in sharing it with others. As a discussion opener, ask people to tell about a wonderful experience they have shared with others.

In this passage, a blind man receives the joy of new-found sight. The healing and the new life which this blind man experiences are duplicated many times over as he testifies to God's goodness and leads others to praise God too.

1. Read the passage aloud. Who are the characters? What seem to be their primary concerns?
2. In verses 38-39, what does the blind man do to attract Jesus' attention? Why are some members of the crowd angry with him? Why do you think the blind man continues to shout?
3. What does the blind man want in verses 40-42? Why is he healed? In what ways do you see the blind man's faith?
4. What are the changes you see in the formerly blind man in verse 43? What does he do as soon as he is healed by Jesus? How does this affect the people around him?
5. In this passage, what does the blind man know about Jesus? Why is he so excited?
6. What are some of the things Jesus has done for us?

In Closing:

Have you experienced this kind of excitement toward Jesus? When and how? What would it be like for us to praise Jesus in such a way that others are encouraged to follow and praise him also?

Zacchaeus: a Transformed Witness

LUKE 19:1-10, by Ann Beyerlein

Getting Started:

Where do people in our culture turn for help, change or transformation?

Jesus is traveling through southern Palestine on his way to Jerusalem. This trip will culminate in his death and resurrection. As he journeys, Jesus makes the most of every opportunity to do ministry. Jericho, a rich agricultural town and popular resort for royalty and priests, was in Jesus' path. Zacchaeus was one of the last people Jesus met before his death. Their encounter illustrates how Jesus can transform a person from the inside out.

1. For background, read or skim Luke 18:31-43. What is happening as Jesus approaches Jericho?
2. Read Luke 19:1-10. In the first six verses (19:1-6), what are some things we learn about Zacchaeus?
3. What kind of reputation might a chief tax collector develop in a town like this? (*Note: "The Romans farmed out the task of collecting the taxes in any particular area to the highest bidder. The man did not receive any salary for his work but collected as much money as he could so that he would have a handsome rake-off after paying the government the appointed sum" [The New Bible Commentary: Revised]. Tax collectors were despised not only by the Romans, but also by their own people.*)
4. What strikes you about the initial meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus? What was the reaction of the crowd as they see this relationship develop between Zacchaeus and Jesus (*verse 7*)?
5. Jesus is a master at building relationships and communicating with people. What does Jesus do to build a friendship with Zacchaeus?
6. What seems to be going on inside Zacchaeus by the end of this encounter (*verses 8-10*)? How is he transformed by meeting Jesus? What might be some of the far reaching effects of this transformation on both Zacchaeus and the other people in his community?
7. How does this passage illustrate Jesus' life mission as stated in *verse 10*?

In Closing:

How have you experienced the seeking or saving power of Jesus in your life (maybe even in the past week)? What are some ways Jesus has changed you? How can you be a witness to Jesus' transforming power in your life?

Peter's Denial: a Negative Witness

LUKE 22:54-62, by Beth Krystl

Getting Started:

Think of a time in your life where you "got caught with your hand in the cookie jar" or you did something you swore you would never do. How did you feel?

This passage takes place just as Judas comes with a crowd of people to arrest Jesus. Only a few hours earlier, Peter had sworn his loyalty to Jesus and had vowed never to leave him. Now he is about to face a crisis situation. We pick up the story at this point. Have someone read Luke 22:54-62.

1. As Jesus is taken away, Peter follows at a distance. What does this tell you about Peter's character?
2. Describe the scene in the courtyard. What is the mood and ambiance of the place?
3. What do you think prompted Peter's denials? What did he fear?
4. What is it Peter denied (see verses 56, 58 and 59)? What did Peter have to lose in being identified with Jesus?
5. How and when are you tempted to avoid being identified with Jesus or his cause? What is it you fear? What is it you would lose?
6. What breaks Peter's string of denial (verses 60-61)?
7. Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter. Why? What kind of look do you think it was? What did it communicate? What "wakes you up" to your sin? How does Jesus look into your life?
8. Once Peter recognizes what he has done, what is significant about his response? Why does he weep? What is your response once you realize your own sin?

In Closing:

What can you learn from Peter about dealing with sin and temptation in your own life? In what situation do you need to stand up for Jesus instead of denying him? Pray for each other that God will give you strength in times of crisis.

The Penitent Thief: a Positive Witness

LUKE 23:39-43, by Arlene Ford

Getting Started:

Think of a time when you have been in a "no-win" situation. How did you feel? How did you respond? What was the outcome?

Two criminals were in that kind of situation in this passage. Jesus was there with both of them.

1. Read the preceding paragraph, verses 32-38, which describes the crucifixion of Jesus. If you were the thieves, what would be your response to Jesus' statement on the cross (verse 34), to what the leaders said in verse 35, to what the soldiers did and said (verses 36-37), and to what the inscription said (verse 38)?
2. What is the attitude of the first criminal (*verse 39*)?
3. What did the second criminal recognize that the first criminal didn't (*verses 40-42*)?
4. Both criminals made a request of Jesus. How are the requests different from one another?
5. From what he says to the first criminal and to Jesus, and how he says it, what do you see about the attitude of the second criminal? What feelings does he seem to be conveying?
6. How did Jesus answer the second criminal's request? What does that tell you about Jesus' response to people?
7. What do you think "paradise" is as Jesus uses it in verse 43? (*Note: The word actually appears only two other times in the New Testament--2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7. Originally it meant an enclosed part of a pleasure ground. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it was used as a term for the garden of Eden, and in intertestamental times it meant a superterrestrial place of happiness. As used here, it can mean "heaven" or "the presence of God."*)
8. Think again about the different attitudes displayed by the two criminals. What attitudes typically characterize your requests to Jesus? In what ways do you wish your attitudes and requests could change?

In Closing:

How was the second criminal a witness to the first by his words and attitude, even in this seemingly no-win situation? Think of a situation you are facing (or might face) in which the people involved have little hope. How can you be a witness to the love and power of Jesus?

Witnesses to the Resurrection

LUKE 24:1-12, by Anna Carney

Getting Started:

Think of some people who know you well. Would they be more likely to characterize you as skeptical and cynical or as gullible and naive? How do you decide when to take someone at his or her word, when to wait for proof or when to disregard someone's story entirely? Have your group talk about some examples of each.

In this study we'll look at how Jesus' closest followers responded to his most outrageous claim--that he would rise from the dead. Their story will help us examine our own belief in Jesus' words and the words of his witness.

1. Have the group members read Luke 23:44-56 individually. Ask one person to summarize the events described from the women's point of view.
2. Read Luke 24:1-12 out loud. Have you ever had to deal with the death of a close friend or relative? (*Ask if just one person would share.*)
3. Keeping this person's experience in mind, look at verses 1-5, putting yourself in these women's shoes. What do we know about their relationship with Jesus? (*See Luke 8:1-3 for more background.*) How has Jesus' death seemed to affect them?
4. What are the women hoping to do once they reach Jesus' tomb? (*Note: Certain spices and ointments were used in the embalming process.*) What do you imagine they are thinking and talking about on the way?
5. What may have gone through their minds when they found the body missing? What might they have thought or felt when two men "in dazzling clothes" joined them in the tomb? How do you think they reacted to the men's initial appearance?
6. The strange men explain things more fully in verses 6-8. What does Luke mean by "then they remembered his words" (verse 8)? What had caused the women to forget Jesus' words? What helps them remember and believe now?
7. In verses 9-11 the women return to the apostles to share what they had seen and heard. How did the women expect the apostles to respond? How do they respond? What does the apostles' response tell us about how the apostles have regarded Jesus' words?
8. In verse 12, why does Peter get up and run to the tomb? How does he respond differently from the other ten apostles? Why?
9. What are Peter's options of what to believe once he sees the tomb? What could prevent him, even at this point, from believing in Jesus' resurrection? Based on the last sentence, which option do you think he chose?

In Closing:

Do you believe that the things Jesus promises will actually happen? When you encounter words of Jesus that are difficult to believe, how do you respond?

- forget them, as the women did initially
- believe, act and bear witness as the women did after their encounter with the messengers
- disregard them as ten of the apostles did
- insist on finding out for yourself as Peter did

What things block you from believing Jesus' words? Do you really believe them? Will you act on them? Here are references to some of Jesus' more radical statements you might want to discuss in your group: Luke 18:29-30; Matthew 25:45-46; Luke 11:19; Matthew 18:35.

Witnesses Whose Eyes Were Opened

LUKE 24:13-35, by Paul Sorrentino

Getting Started:

Try to think of a time when you were struggling to understand something and, suddenly, the "lights came on" and everything became perfectly clear. What happened to make the difference?

In this study we will look at two disciples who go from confusion to insight in their thinking about Jesus. Have a few people read Luke 24:13-35 or assign parts (narrator; Cleopas and the other disciple; Jesus; the eleven and their companions).

1. Place yourself in the scene of verses 13-24. What are these travelers doing, thinking and feeling? Why does Jesus ask the two what they are discussing (verse 17) and "what things" had been going on lately (verse 19)?
2. How would you evaluate the response of Cleopas and the other disciple? What do you think of their "gospel"?
3. Look again at verses 25-27. Is Jesus being hard on the disciples? Why or why not? What is he especially concerned about? Why do you think it was "necessary" for the Messiah to "suffer these things and then enter into his glory"? (*Note: "His glory" refers to his resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand.*)
4. Jesus referred to passages throughout all the Scriptures that were about him. What are some of these passages that he might have referred to? (*Note: There are many such passages; you might want to read some verses such as Genesis 3:15; Numbers 21:6-9 [with John 3:14-15]; Deuteronomy 18:15; Psalms 22; 16:8-11; 118:22-23; Isaiah 11:1-7; 53:1-6; 61:1 [with Luke 4:18-22]; Daniel 7:13-14 [with Matthew 26:64].*)
5. In the final verses, how do the disciples come to recognize Jesus? What part did the Scriptures play in their coming to recognize him (*verses 27 and 32*)?
6. What do you think it means that their hearts "burned within them" when Jesus opened the Scriptures to them (*verse 32*)? Have you ever experienced this as you engaged the Scriptures?
7. What do the disciples finally come to understand? How do they respond? How have they become witnesses?

In Closing:

As you reflect on this passage, what do you see about how Jesus helped two confused people come to see the truth about his resurrection and become witnesses to it? What principles can you use when you speak about Jesus? What difference can the reality of Jesus' resurrection make to you each day?

Jesus Prepares His Witnesses

LUKE 24:36-53, by Nina Thiel

Getting Started:

Imagine you are the baby-sitters for three small children whose parents are going away for the weekend. You are at their home, and they are leaving in fifteen minutes. What kinds of things do you think they'll tell you? What will you need to know to make it a successful, joyful weekend?

In this passage, Jesus isn't preparing baby-sitters, he's preparing witnesses. This is his last recorded interaction with his followers in Luke's gospel. As someone reads Luke 24:36-53, watch and listen for how he prepares them.

1. In the preceding passage, two of Jesus' followers have been with the resurrected Jesus, heard him explain his mission from the Scriptures, eaten with him and recognized him. In 24:33-35, these two have returned to Jerusalem to tell "the eleven and their companions" what happened. In the middle of their discussion, Jesus appears. Why does he greet them the way he does?
2. What words and phrases communicate the thoughts of Jesus' followers in verses 37-43? When have you wanted to believe something, but couldn't believe it at the same time?
3. What are all the things Jesus does to help them believe it is really he, risen from death? How does this strengthen your belief in Jesus?
4. In verses 44-47, what does Jesus want his followers to understand? How does he help them understand? When have you experienced a similar "breakthrough" in Bible study?
5. In verses 48-49, Jesus lets his followers in on their role in the continuing fulfillment of the Scriptures. What will be involved immediately in being witnesses? What do you expect their "job description" to be once they are empowered by the Holy Spirit?
6. Imagine the parting scene in verses 50-51. What would a blessing from Jesus mean to you if you were there?
7. How do Jesus' followers respond to their last interaction with Jesus (verses 52-53)? Why worship? Why obedience (returning to Jerusalem)? Why joy? How does the joy in verse 52 differ from the joy in verse 41? Describe a time when you've felt this way.
8. How did Jesus' followers change from verses 37-43 to verses 52-53? What was the process? How have you seen Jesus use the same progression to prepare you to be his witness? (*Note: The process includes (1) helping you believe Jesus is real; (2) helping you understand the Scriptures concerning him; and (3) helping you respond in worshipful, joyful obedience or action.*) What do you need more of in order to take your place joyfully in God's plan to preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations"?
9. If you didn't know anything about Luke's next book, Acts, what would you expect it to contain, based on the end of Luke?

In Closing:

Through the Gospels, we are witnesses to the same things these followers of Jesus saw. Like these followers, we are witnesses to the work he's done in our lives to bring us to belief, understanding and action. Name one opportunity you'll have this week to "testify" for Jesus as his witness. What are you hoping to say or explain in order to point someone to him? Close in prayer for each other's growth as witnesses in belief, understanding or action and for specific opportunities to testify as Jesus' witnesses.

"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.

Many thanks to those who gave their time to the writing and editing of these studies: the InterVarsity® staff authors (mentioned with each study); Kathy Burrows (design); Jeff Yourison (layout editor); and Shelley Soceka and Judy Yourison (proofreaders).--Bob Grahmann, editor

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