

Grace under Pressure

Studies from the Book of Luke

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PART I

EARLY YEARS AND PUBLIC MINISTRY

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION

If there is anything outstanding in the life of Christ as portrayed in the book of Luke, it is *grace under pressure*. Jesus was faced with every conceivable challenge in His thirty-three short years—including rejection, loneliness, loss, betrayal, exhaustion and always the pressing needs of people around Him. Yet His faithfulness, love, patience, purpose and integrity were never shaken.

As he penned the book, Luke meant to show that Jesus had *grace under pressure*. He was writing to the sophisticated Greek audience who would appreciate the perfect humanity of the Lord. At the same time, Luke was careful to show that Christ was also the God of glory coming down to our level, entering into our conditions, and being subject to our circumstances. Luke shows that while Jesus mingled with men, He was in sharp contrast to them. He toiled with His hands, wept over Jerusalem, knelt in prayer and knew agony and suffering. Yet His teachings, miracles, and sinless life proved His claims to be the Son of God.

Many of Luke's day had undertaken to write a documentary on the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Man whose life changed the course of history. Inspired by a Gentile of high standing named Theophilus, Luke joined the

writers of his day. Committed to complete accuracy, Luke became the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. His two-part series, consisting of the books of *Luke* and *Acts*, records the life of Christ and the history of the early church.

Being a physician, Luke was meticulous in gathering information before a diagnosis. His research and writings were, therefore, precise. Being the traveling companion of the Apostle Paul, Luke had access to the best teachings about Christ as well as opportunity to interact with everyone from the Apostles to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke's assets, as well as his giftedness as a writer, allowed God to use him to write the most complete account of the life of Jesus, an account that would one day bear the authority of God.

The book of Luke was written to help Theophilus, a Gentile Christian, become intelligent and confident as a believer in Christ. Theophilus needed, as we do, answers to the questions: “Who is Jesus? What is my relationship to Him, and how does it begin? How does this affect the way I live? and Why should I live this way?” As we follow the story of Jesus in this book, we will receive, as did Theophilus, God’s answers to these very important questions. In so doing, we will learn invaluable truths about how to find *grace under pressure*.

JOYFUL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Luke 1:1-2:40

After assuring his reader of the meticulous historical accuracy of his work, Luke begins his account with the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. The announcement of John’s birth to his father Zechariah was as supernatural as the announcement six months later to Mary about the birth of Jesus. Both were given by the angel Gabriel. Both involved miraculous conception of a child. Both concerned the coming of the long-awaited Savior Messiah of the world. The natural response to these announcements was amazement and great joy as God fulfilled His plans to bless the world with His Son, Jesus.

The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive and give birth to “Jesus,” meaning Lord-Savior. He also informed Mary about her cousin Elizabeth’s miraculous conception of a son. Immediately after the angel left her, Mary hurried off to the hill country of Galilee where Zachariah and Elizabeth lived.

When Mary greeted her cousin, Elizabeth’s baby actually leaped in her womb, and the Holy Spirit gave her words of encouragement for Mary. Mary responded with a song of praise to God, filled with Old Testament Scripture pointing to the promised Messiah.

Three months later, John was born, and the whole hill country town was excited about the miraculous events surrounding his birth. His father Zechariah insisted the boy be named “John” rather than a family name, saying an angel had so instructed him. Not only that, but Zechariah was once again able to speak after nine months of silence. His first words were a song of praise to God. Like Mary’s song, it was filled with Old Testament Scripture promises about the coming of Christ.

Six months later, Mary and her betrothed husband, Joseph, traveled south from their hometown of Nazareth, to register with the Roman census in Bethlehem. There Mary gave birth to a son and named him Jesus, as the angel had instructed her nine months earlier.

Meanwhile, angels appeared to some shepherds in nearby fields to herald the Savior’s birth. They immediately left their flocks and visited the baby, who was just where they had been told. Their natural response was praise to God for all they had seen and heard.

After the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph traveled north from Bethlehem to Jerusalem where they dedicated their new son to God, as was customary. Surely the shepherds’ visit and story of the angels encouraged Joseph and Mary, but at the temple, they experienced yet another miraculous sign of God’s hand on their lives. Simeon and Anna, both elderly and godly servants of the Lord in the Temple, were led by the Holy Spirit to recognize

the baby Jesus as the promised Messiah. They openly praised God and told people of the Savior's birth, while Mary and Joseph stood by in amazement.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Prescription for Peace

“For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God . . . Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

“ . . . to guide our feet into the path of peace,” Zechariah sang (Luke 1:79), as he foretold the coming King.

“I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone!” (Luke 2:10 LB) the angel proclaimed to the shepherds. “ . . . on earth peace to men . . . ,” the angelic choir sang as they heralded the birth of Jesus.

Indeed peace is a major issue in our world today. In the midst of difficulty, pain, and everyday pressures, is peace really possible? The “most joyful news ever announced” is that because of Christ's coming, the answer is “yes!” The Bible tells us how to find and keep this precious commodity.

LESSON 2

MINISTRY BEGINNINGS

Luke 2:41-4:41

When Jesus was twelve years old, he was unintentionally left behind as the family began the journey home from the Passover in Jerusalem. They went back and found Jesus in the temple, sitting among the religious teachers who were amazed at His understanding. Jesus told his parents that He thought they would know to find Him in His Father's house. Though she and Joseph did not fully understand, Mary “treasured all these things in her heart” (2:50-51).

After this, Luke moved his account forward about seventeen years to the beginnings of John the Baptist's ministry. At his birth, Zechariah had prophesied John would be the forerunner for the Messiah's coming (1:76). The Old Testament had prophesied such a man would come in “the spirit

and power of Elijah” (Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 1:17). Elijah was a rugged Old Testament prophet who preached repentance. John was such a preacher, but Luke described John’s message as “good news” (3:18). He preached that the Savior Messiah was coming soon, and that anyone could be prepared for His coming if they acknowledged their sin and turned to godly living. God’s salvation and forgiveness was available to *all* who repented.

Many Jewish aristocrats did not agree with John because they believed that only Gentiles would be judged and punished when the Messiah came. John predicted judgment for *all* whose hearts were not right toward God and preached that God’s salvation would become available to Jew and Gentile alike through the Messiah (3:6).

Through his preaching and baptizing, John prepared the people’s hearts for the coming Messiah. When individuals made decisions to repent and have their sins forgiven, John baptized them in the Jordan River as an outward expression of their inward experience of cleansing. Then one day Jesus came to be baptized by John. Although sinless Himself, Jesus submitted to John’s baptism in order to affirm and also identify Himself with the ministry of John.

God had shown John that the identifying sign of the Christ would be the Spirit descending in the form of a dove upon Him (John 1:32-34). To further confirm the Christ, a voice from heaven declared, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (3:22).

Jesus, led and empowered by the Spirit of God, went into the wilderness of Judea where he fasted and was tested by Satan for forty days. Three of the tests were highlighted. Jesus responded with commitment to God’s will and Word. At the end of the period, Satan left Jesus until a later time.

The first part of the ministry of Jesus took place mainly in Galilee and covered a time period of two and a half years. His reputation grew as He traveled about preaching in the synagogues, healing and delivering people from evil spirits.

Then Luke gave a sample day in the ministry of Christ (4:31-41). This particular one was on a Sabbath in the Galilean town of Capernaum. After teaching in the synagogue, He delivered a man from a demonic spirit, then went to the home of Simon Peter to heal his mother-in-law of a fever. The evening was spent laying His hands on many sick who were brought to Him for healing. Demonic spirits recognized Jesus as the Son of God and, at His command, came out of people they possessed.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

The Need for Quiet

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart”
(Luke 2:19).

Quietness is a rare commodity in our world today. The word “quiet” means to be free of noise, hushed, calm and unmoving, still, restful. Yet noise is such a part of our society that some people need music to keep them company when put “on hold” on the telephone.

Quiet, however, is something we all need . . . in order to “ponder” our relationship to God and our responses to the challenges of our lives. It is in quiet that we find “grace under pressure.”

Mary pondered quietly in her heart. She meditated on the greatness of God (Luke 1:46-55), on His good plans for her life (Luke 1:47-49), and on the amazing experience of parenting the Son of God (Luke 2:19,51).

God is able to work His greatest miracles in our lives quietly, as we take the time to ponder or meditate quietly before Him. We live in a noisy world, but God’s peace and strength is there for us. Let’s take a look at what the Bible has to say about our need for quiet.

LESSON 3

MORE GALILEAN MINISTRY

Luke 4:42-6:11

Early in the morning, Jesus took time to be alone for solitude and prayer before starting the new day’s work. The people of Capernaum wanted Jesus

to stay in their city, but He explained that He must move on in order to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to other towns also.

The next scene took place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (see map). This was a large body of water, about thirteen miles long and eight miles wide, surrounded by hills and numerous cities. Capernaum and Bethsaida (to the north) were centers of the fishing industry.

On this morning, Jesus was teaching the people who crowded about Him when he noticed Simon Peter and other fishermen cleaning their nets after a night of fishing. The gently rising land along the shore made the lake front a natural auditorium. To get space from the crowds, Jesus borrowed Simon Peter's boat as an offshore pulpit from which to teach.

After He finished speaking, Jesus instructed Peter and his partners, James and John, to go out to the deeper waters and let down their nets. Peter, an experienced fisherman, had fished all night, while the fish were nearer the surface, and caught nothing. Even though he was quite sure it would be impossible to catch anything now that the fish were at deeper levels, he agreed to Jesus' request. To their amazement, their nets began to break from the catch of fish, and Peter knew the One in his boat was not just a man. Humbled and frightened, he knelt before the Lord, acknowledging his own unworthiness.

Jesus calmed their fears, and with the picture of their great catch fresh in their minds, promised to make them "fishers of men." As disciples of Jesus, Simon, James and John had continued their fishing business. Now the Lord called them to special service, and they left their boats to follow Him. The account continues as Jesus healed a man in the final stages of leprosy, then sent him to the priest who had authority to reinstate him in the community (Leviticus 14 speaks of this Jewish law). Because of such miracles, word about Jesus spread everywhere. He was beset continually with crowds of people to whom He ministered through teaching and healing. To refresh Himself, He would regularly take opportunities to get alone to pray.

The fame of Jesus began to attract religious leaders known as Pharisees and scribes from all parts of the land to Galilee to observe Him and listen critically to His teaching. One day as Jesus was healing sick people brought to Him in a home, some faithful men made a hole in the roof through which to lower their paralyzed friend before Jesus. The Lord's words before healing this paralytic were, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Knowing the religious leaders scrutinizing Him recognized this to be a claim to deity (considered blasphemy since only God could forgive sin), Jesus performed an act to prove His claim. He instructed this paralyzed man to get up and walk. The man did so, and everyone praised God in awe.

Jesus met further reprimand from the religious leaders who were watching Him when he called Levi, or Matthew, a tax collector to be a disciple. The Pharisees had utterly rejected such people, and Jesus' willingness to have dinner with Matthew's friends—tax collectors and "sinners"—elicited more criticism. Jesus responded by stating that He had come for those who recognized their need for help, not those who considered themselves righteous.

Travelers were allowed to pick grain or fruits for immediate consumption in Palestine (Deuteronomy 23:24-25), but strict interpretation of the Jewish Law regarding the Sabbath did not allow such "work" on that day. One Sabbath during their Galilean preaching tour, Jesus and His disciples were eating grain as they passed through a field. The Pharisees immediately confronted Jesus about their actions. He responded by referring to the time when David rightfully did what was unlawful to feed his men in an emergency situation (I Samuel 21:1-6). Furthermore, Jesus claimed to be Lord of (have authority over) the Sabbath Himself.

Angered by their defeat in the argument and appalled at His presumptuous claims, the scribes and Pharisees became anxious to trap Jesus in something He might do or say. On another Sabbath, they watched with critical eyes as He healed a man's shriveled hand before everyone in the synagogue. Jesus then made the undeniable point that since it *was* lawful to do good on the Sabbath, it was therefore lawful to heal. Beaten in argument and discredited

before the people, Jesus' opponents became hostile, and so began the conflict that would last the duration of Christ's ministry.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Preventing Burnout

Burnout is a common word of our day. It has to do with packed days and heavy demands from responsibilities in our lives. Burnout is often caused from emotional stress, which causes physical problems that ultimately bring our activities to a halt. The potential we have can be wasted when burnout ends our involvement in some task for which we are very gifted.

Jesus' life held much potential for burnout. He often met public opposition to His already enormous task of bringing God's Word to man. His days were busy; each hour and every day were precious to Him. He taught and talked even as He walked from place to place. People came to Him early and late with needs. He was on the road continually, so much so that He did not even have a home or a bed of His own. On top of it all, Jesus knew that His work would end with death on a cross. How did Jesus avoid *burnout*? The answer is found in Jesus' practice of getting alone for intervals of *waiting on God*. In these times, He was able to be refreshed, restored and redirected in His mission on earth. It was through these times that He laid hold of God's perspective, energy and priorities for His life. No doubt His time alone with God resulted in a silent habit of *waiting on God* during every moment of His day.

What does it mean to *wait* on God? How can it help prevent burnout in our lives? Let's make some observations about this practice that Jesus modeled for us.

LESSON 4

SERMON ON THE PLAIN

Luke 6:12-49

Rising opposition and the issue of choosing the right men as His close associates called for a long time of counsel with the Father. After spending a

night alone in prayer, Jesus chose twelve apostles with whom He would travel and work closely.

Luke then records what has become known as the Sermon on the Plain. Jesus' words gave encouragement to those who would choose to build their lives on His teachings. He promised that the possible poverty, emotional stress and rejection encountered by those who followed Him would be magnificently rewarded in heaven.

His teaching then focused on godly responses to enemies. Being the essence of God's character, unconditional love was the heart of Jesus' teaching. He taught love instead of revenge, the principle He Himself practiced that both brought Him to earth and led to His death (Romans 5:8; I John 4:10). Other principles Jesus touched on regarded leaving judgment to God, practicing generosity in relationships, and appropriately discerning character in others. He closed this famous sermon with a vivid word picture. Because the hills in Palestine had little vegetation, there were terrible floods in which only buildings founded on rock could survive. Christ taught that the only secure foundation for life could be found in His words, making Himself the only true object of faith and the Rock upon which we should build our lives.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Coping With Conflict

Conflict was unavoidable for Christ. His place over—rather than under—the authority of the religious leaders of the day threatened the Pharisees' exalted position in society. Not only that, but His teachings openly conflicted with their rigid rules and publicly exposed their hypocrisy.

Included in Jesus' teaching on relating to our enemies was a description of how He would be treated by His opposition: hated, cursed, mistreated, physically abused, and, had it been possible, robbed of His authority as the Son of God. Jesus did not teach about dealing with conflict from an ivory tower.

Although uncomfortable, conflict can be a healthy part of life. Whether with enemies or in close relationships, we all face degrees of conflict at some

time. Jesus both taught and modeled how to handle conflict in ways that bring about positive results. As we continue our study of *Grace under Pressure*, we will observe biblical principles related to coping with conflict.

LESSON 5

JESUS TOUCHES THE NEEDY

Luke 7:1-8:18.

Early in His ministry, Jesus identified Himself as one “anointed to preach good news to the poor” (4:18). He declared in the Sermon on the Plain, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (6:20). In this lesson, we will meet some who qualified as “poor” . . . a Roman officer, a needy widow, a long-imprisoned John the Baptist, and a repentant prostitute. All had one thing in common: Jesus touched their lives.

The Roman officer was a centurion, probably over a company of one hundred of Herod’s soldiers. Respected by the Jews, this man had genuine affection for his dying servant and a rare love for the Jewish people. Jewish elders actually approached Jesus with this man’s need for his servant’s healing. As Jesus walked toward the centurion’s home, He discovered a humility and faith in this man that amazed Him. The officer actually believed that Jesus had authority from God to heal his servant from a distance with just a word. Jesus did just that, then turned to those around Him to state that He had not seen such great faith in all of Israel (where it would be expected).

The widow in Nain was in the midst of her son’s funeral procession. In addition to the grief and loss she felt, this woman had probably been dependent on her son. As Jesus saw her situation, His “heart went out” to her, and many wailing witnesses watched the Lord give the command that resuscitated the corpse before their very eyes.

No doubt word of this miracle spread far and wide, even to the jail cell of John the Baptist. Long imprisoned and discouraged, John sent his disciples to Jesus to confirm that He was the One John had foretold. Jesus gave them words of affirmation and encouragement to take to John. He then turned to

the crowd around Him to praise John as a great prophet. He pointed out John's steadfast convictions and rugged endurance of hardship and stated that John's role of preparing the way for the Lord (Malachi 3:1) made him the last and greatest of the prophets.

The final needy person in this chapter was a prostitute. She slipped uninvited into a dinner party where Jesus was reclined at the table to make a plea for the forgiveness of her sins. As she anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume, she kissed them and washed them with her hair. The host of the dinner, a Pharisee named Simon, was appalled by Jesus' receptiveness to this sinful woman.

Knowing his thoughts, Jesus addressed Simon with a story that held the attention of the dinner guests and made an unmistakable point. Two people owed a creditor \$85 and \$8.50 respectively, and the lender forgave both debts. Then Jesus asked Simon which debtor would love the lender more? Simon gave the obvious answer: it would be the one forgiven more. With this, Jesus made a clear comparison between his religious host and the prostitute. Washing feet, greeting with a kiss, and putting a touch of perfumed oil on the head of a guest were common courtesies Simon had neglected to extend to Jesus. In contrast, the prostitute had washed, kissed and anointed His feet. The story and comparisons contrasted the humble devotion of the woman and Simon's pride and self-righteousness. After making this point, Jesus turned to the woman to pronounce her sins forgiven because of her faith, and she left in peace.

After a time of basing His ministry in Capernaum, Jesus began a second tour of the Galilean countryside. Traveling with Him were the Twelve and some women, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna. Jesus had begun to teach primarily in parables. These were stories that encouraged a response from those who had faith in God and that were evaded by the critical or indifferent listener.

The opening scene of the two days or so recorded in Chapter 8 depicts a crowd gathering around Jesus. He gave an illustration known as the Parable

of the Sower. In this parable, which Jesus told to the masses and then explained to the committed followers present, He laid out the different heart responses to the truth of God's word. He showed how Satan, trials, and temporal concerns or pleasures could rob one of a rich experience of faith and ministry to others.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Becoming a Good Influence

All of us have a sphere of influence far beyond the four walls of our home. We each have an effect on our community, the world at large and future generations. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus summarizes the heart of the person who not only receives God's wisdom but also becomes a good influence in the world around him.

While Jesus performed many miracles of healing and deliverance, these acts were not meant to dazzle the crowds. Their purpose was to demonstrate the compassion of God, to prove that Jesus was God's Son, and to lead people to put their faith in Him. All Jesus said and did, therefore, was meant to influence people into receiving the Kingdom of God.

Through His life of wholehearted devotion to the will of God, Jesus modeled the nobility of heart that can make us a life-giving light to others. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus set this primary objective for our lives that results from a noble heart toward God. Let's look more closely at those biblical principles that are integral to becoming a good influence.

LESSON 6

MORE GALILEAN MINISTRY

Luke 8:22-9:26

Four powerful acts are recorded in the remainder of Chapter 8. Jesus stopped a storm on the Sea of Galilee, restored a man made wild by demonic possession, healed a woman who had been bleeding incurably for twelve years, and brought back to life a twelve-year-old daughter of a

synagogue leader.

After this, Jesus sent the apostles out to saturate Galilee with the good news of the kingdom. He empowered them to heal and to drive out demonic spirits as signs that their message was indeed from God. They took nothing with them, trusting God to provide their needs through people in the various towns. When a Jewish town rejected their message, the apostles were instructed to shake the dust from their feet, thus pronouncing that city unrighteous before God. So it was that Jesus and His message were noticed everywhere. Even Herod, the Roman ruler who by now had executed John the Baptist, wondered about this Jesus of Nazareth.

When the apostles returned, Jesus led them to a secluded area for a retreat. The crowds, however, knew where they had gone and followed in large numbers. Jesus graciously welcomed and ministered to them. When evening approached, five thousand men and perhaps up to six thousand women and children stood in the wilderness around Jesus without means for food. After seating and organizing the people into groups of fifty, Jesus collected five loaves and two fish from the apostles, gave thanks to God and proceeded to miraculously feed everyone present. The apostles gathered twelve basketfuls of leftovers.

Everyone from Herod to the crowds was asking the question: Who is this Jesus? The Twelve, more than anyone else, had observed His life, ministry and message. One day Jesus asked them who the crowds said He was. After hearing their answers, He asked them who they thought He was. Peter, usually the spokesperson for the Twelve, answered, "The Christ of God." Knowing that public reactions to this information would result in the people attempting to make Him a king, Jesus instructed the Twelve not to repeat their knowledge. He went on to explain that God's plan for the Messiah was rejection by religious leaders, followed by His death and resurrection three days later. Such predictions showed that while the killing of Jesus was a tragedy, it was not an accident. Clearly Jesus knew that His death fulfilled God's plan of redemption.

Jesus continued by teaching his men about the complete commitment required of his followers. The Romans had executed hundreds of slaves and lower class people by crucifixion. The vivid word picture of taking up a “daily cross” to follow Jesus clearly described the dedication involved in being His disciple. However, Jesus promised that such wholehearted commitment to Him would result in both real fulfillment and salvation to the soul. Jesus told them that this salvation was worth more than possessing the whole world. Rejection of Him, on the other hand, would bring eternal loss.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Strength in the Valleys

With the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, Jesus came to the peak of his popularity. Refusing to become a king, however, and concentrating more on discipling the Twelve, Jesus began to lose public support from this point on. Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem and began His journey to the cross. In a sense, the rest of Jesus’ experience on earth was *in the valley*. The Son of God did not elevate Himself above our own experience with life. How did He experience comfort and faith in the valley? How can we? Let’s look at some of the principles that give us wisdom in the valleys of life.

PART 2

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE: THE ROAD TO THE CROSS

LESSON 7

INTRODUCTION

Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (9:51). Having completed His work in Galilee, Jesus began to saturate Judea with the message of the Kingdom while traveling toward His final destination of Jerusalem.

Luke recorded the events of Jesus’ ministry in Judea into a collection of stories. Many of the episodes and parables found here are not recorded elsewhere and are probably the result of Luke’s personal in-depth research. The account represents the teaching of Jesus in the last year of His ministry and reflects a time of rejection and tension.

It was during this time that Jesus began to carefully teach His disciples the cost of commitment to Him. More importantly, He began to disclose the redemptive purpose of His life, the good news that He would soon commission them to preach throughout the world.

TURNING TOWARD JERUSALEM

Luke 9:51-10:37

Jesus and His disciples began their journey to Judea from Galilee, which required travel through Samaria. Being hostile to the Jews, the Samaritans in the first village they entered refused to host Jesus' group. James and John were incensed with these Samaritans, who (albeit unknowingly) had insulted the Lord Himself. They requested Jesus' permission to call down fire from heaven to destroy the entire town, but Jesus censured their idea.

As they journeyed on, Jesus had various conversations along the road with people who wanted to follow Him, but had reservations about doing so. The Lord made clear that becoming His disciple required one to make God's purposes top priority. He used the illustration of a farmer, who, once started plowing, must always look forward if he is to plow a straight furrow. There could be no half-hearted commitment by His disciples.

Once in Judea, Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples in teams of two to preach about the Kingdom throughout the countryside. Knowing that the days left in His ministry were few, there was an urgency in Jesus' instructions. The disciples were to travel light, avoid lengthy salutations, and refrain from moving from house to house to find the most comfortable quarters. As a sign that their message was from God, Jesus gave them power to heal and to take charge over demonic spirits. As in Galilee (9:5), the disciples were instructed to pronounce judgment on faithless cities by shaking the dust from their feet as they left. Such towns were to be pitied, Jesus said, because their sin would deserve a harsher judgment than pagan cities that had not received such knowledge about God's kingdom.

The seventy-two returned with joy, telling of the powerful works they had done in Jesus' name. Jesus rejoiced with them, but encouraged them to be careful to rejoice more in what God had done for them than in the work He empowered them to do. Filled with joy, Jesus praised God for revealing

Himself to humble hearts and for working through faithful disciples. Luke moves on to another occasion, when an expert in the Jewish law asked a question to test Jesus. The Lord managed to have this man answer his own question by asking *him* a question. Then the lawyer asked a second question, to which Jesus responded with what has become known as the parable of the good Samaritan. This story illustrates both the definition and cost of genuine love.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Love Defined: The Generous Heart

As Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan, He gave a challenging definition for genuine love—love must be generous to be authentic. According to this story, one who loves is kind and gives liberally—of acceptance, time, mercy, forgiveness and possessions—in order to meet the needs of lovely and unlovely alike.

The cost of genuine love is open-handed generosity, and the rewards are great. Let's look at the biblical principles and promises related to the love that comes from a generous heart.

LESSON 8

TEACHINGS IN BETHANY AND JUDEA

Luke 10:38-11:54

As Jesus began teaching in Judea, He stopped in the village of Bethany, where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him and His disciples. Upset by her sister Mary's decision to be sitting at the Lord's feet instead of helping with meal preparations, Martha told the Lord to tell Mary to help her. Jesus responded by affirming Mary's priorities—her love for Him was most important—and gently encouraged Martha not to be overburdened by less significant worries.

At a later time, one of Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. In response, Jesus gave a prayer to serve as a guide for communication with God. The prayer began by using a child's word for father to address God, implying a relationship of love based on closeness. The rest of the simply worded prayer included worship and requests for God's will, provision,

forgiveness and protection.

Using a parable to illustrate how we should continue to pray about our needs and desires, Jesus gave assurance that God will hear and answer every prayer more graciously and lovingly than any earthly father could. The Lord concluded by teaching that God freely gives His most precious gift, the Holy Spirit, to all who ask in prayer.

Luke moves on to recount an event where Jesus had delivered a man from a demonic spirit and His opponents accused Him of drawing on satanic power. Jesus responded by exposing the fact that if Satan¹ gave power to destroy His own forces, He would defeat Himself. Furthermore, by accusing Jesus of Satanism, they essentially condemned their own leaders who also practiced exorcism of demonic spirits in God's name (11:19).

Jesus encouraged them to face the more obvious truth: God's Spirit, or *the finger of God* (Luke 11:20; Matthew 12:28), gave Jesus His power to perform miracles as a sign that His words were from God. The two parables that followed pointed to the foolishness of opposing the Lord and the need to join Him in order to receive God's blessing in life (11:21-28). Jesus began to explain that the light of the Kingdom of God can fill our lives and be shared with others. That light, however, cannot be experienced by those with "bad eyes." During dinner at the home of a Pharisee, Jesus elaborated on what characterizes the one with poor spiritual eyesight. The subject was introduced when Jesus was criticized for His failure to observe the custom of washing before the meal. He responded by pinpointing specific characteristics of the hypocrisy practiced by religious leaders of the day: namely greed, spiritual pride and cruel treatment of those dependent on their spiritual guidance.

Jesus mentioned the embarrassing fact that the martyrs of one generation curiously became the heroes of the next. Obviously it was easier to build monuments to the dead prophets than to acknowledge the truth brought by those prophets in their midst. The worst case scenario of this tendency was in the rejection of Jesus, the One to whom all the prophets had lived and

died to give testimony. Jesus warned that the crime of those who killed Him would equal the murder of all the prophets put together who had foretold His coming.

After thoroughly rebuking the religious experts, Jesus left the Pharisee's home with sworn enemies. The crowds, however, continued to follow Him by the thousands.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

One Necessary Thing

The greatest joy must have come to Jesus from disciples like Mary of Bethany who were wholeheartedly committed to Him. They recognized Him as both the Christ and the Lord and were thrilled to just be in His presence. There was, no doubt, another category of followers, who although devoted, concentrated more on what they did *for* Jesus than on learning *from* Him. The assumption may have been that they already knew what He had to say, so rather than listen to Him, they busily carried out their own agenda of good works.

Martha seemed to be the latter, and many of us can identify with her. Full of good uses of time and high ideals, we can't seem to find time for "sitting at Jesus' feet." Besides, what more is there to learn?

Although the consequences of this mentality are serious for one generation, they are often devastating to the next. Its children learn a religion that concentrates on good works, excluding the need for a personal relationship with Jesus that is essential to the Christian faith.

Jesus spoke of "only one" necessary thing, and for those who maintain this one thing in life, the blessing is sure and cannot be taken away. Let's take a closer look at this "one necessary thing" that gives indestructible grace under pressure.

LESSON 9

MORE JUDEAN TEACHINGS

Luke 12:1-13:9

Disregarding enemies and admirers, Jesus continued to focus on teaching his

disciples. He warned against the cancerous hypocrisy of the Pharisees that would one day be exposed, and He encouraged His followers to remember their great worth to God as they faced persecution for their faith. "...the very hairs of your head are all numbered," Jesus said. "Don't be afraid..." (12:7).

Jesus said compromise can eventually destroy the believer's true knowledge of God. Instead, He instructed his disciples to fully accept the Holy Spirit's revelation of His Lordship and make a public avowal of loyalty to Him. When brought to trial for their faith, He promised that the Holy Spirit would give them the right words to say (12:11-12).

After teaching His disciples *not* to fear the ridicule of those who opposed faith in Him, the Lord began to teach about some things that *we should* fear. When an angry man came forward in the crowd insisting that Jesus settle the disagreement between his brother and him over their inheritance, Jesus refused. But He took the opportunity to teach about our need to fear the presence of greed in our lives. Telling the story of a selfish rich man who suddenly found himself facing God and leaving his wealth behind, Jesus warned that what a man *is* is more important than what he *has*. Those who put God first in their lives can be free from worry over temporal needs and be ready to face God and eternity. Jesus went on to say that putting God first also makes us ready for Christ's second coming to earth, an event that will surely and unexpectedly happen.

Fear is appropriate, Jesus taught, if self-centered allegiances that do not prepare a soul for eternity are causing one to miss the opportunity to be made right with God through faith in His Son.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Being Ready for Life's Challenges

The man's business concerns consumed him . . . until the day he learned he had a terminal illness. Instantly his focus changed . . . business concerns faded and more than business expertise was needed to cope.

Jesus continually encouraged people to look at the future, beyond the

temporal things of this world to a kingdom that will never end. He encouraged people to take their eyes off the seen and put them on the unseen world where a loving Savior and heavenly Father seek the individual's best. Whether in everyday challenges or major seasons of difficulty, God desires to make us fearless because of an assurance of His ultimate provision and protection. He wants us to trust in Him, know His peace and focus on His kingdom. Such prepare us for the least to the greatest of life's challenges. Let's make some observations.

LESSON 10

BEGINNINGS OF PUBLIC DEBATE

Luke 13:10-15:32

While teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus healed a woman who had been crippled for 18 years. The synagogue ruler indirectly rebuked Jesus as he announced to all that they should only come for healing on other days of the week. But Jesus pointed out the hypocrisy in the man's rebuke. The insistence that the Pharisaic interpretation of Mosaic Sabbath law be strictly followed was a cover-up for his desire to undermine Jesus' works. Jesus went on to interpret the law correctly for them: since an animal's thirst could be taken care of on a Sabbath, certainly a suffering human being could be relieved. This logic made Sabbath healing not only allowable, but obligatory.

On another Sabbath, Jesus was having dinner at the home of a chief Pharisee when he spotted a man with dropsy, a pitiful swelling of the body caused by excess fluid retention. He healed the man outright, pointing out to the religious leaders once again that if it was lawful to help an animal on the Sabbath, it was lawful to heal. They could say nothing against His logic without condemning themselves, so they kept silent. Then, noticing how anxious the guests at this dinner were to get the more honored seats, Jesus told a parable that reflected the importance of humility before man and God. He added that God also wants us to practice hospitality toward the indigent and helpless, not just those who can return the favor. Jesus promised those who do this will reap heavenly rewards (14:1-14).

The scene turns to the dusty streets of a Galilean city where Jesus once again faced rebuke from religious leaders. The issue was Jesus' practice of welcoming tax collectors and "sinners" (15:1). The Pharisees believed it improper for a religious leader to associate with such people.

In response, Jesus told three parables that reflected God's desire to reclaim outcast people. The first parable was about a shepherd who left his ninety-nine sheep to find one that was lost. The second spoke of a woman who lost one of ten silver coins and searched diligently until she found it. The third parable described a father who welcomed home a son who had taken his inheritance and squandered it in a distant land.

Jesus used these parables to illustrate different aspects of God's mercy and love for every human being, especially seemingly insignificant or totally sinful ones. In contrast, Jesus used the selfish brother in the third parable to reflect the Pharisees' lack of mercy and compassion for broken people.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

In Support of Liking Yourself

Almost everyone struggles with a poor self-image at one time or another. Jesus' association with the street people and outcasts of His day assures us, however, that God is not partial to the perfect. In fact, the Bible states that God's love for us is sacrificial and unconditional. While He hates the sin that hurts us, He continues to love the sinner, offering forgiveness with open arms.

God's love for us as unique individuals is the greatest reason for valuing ourselves. Let's take a look at His perspective—in support of liking ourselves.

LESSON 11

MISCELLANEOUS TEACHINGS

Luke 16:10-15; 17:11-18:30

Turning to His followers, Jesus told a parable illustrating how we should use what we have to help others enter His Kingdom, adding that dual allegiance

to God and money is impossible. “You cannot serve both God and Money,” He said. The Pharisees around Jesus sneered at His words, but Jesus warned that God could see the pride and greed in their hearts, and their values were detestable to Him.

Later, Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem along the border between Samaria and Galilee when ten lepers stood at a distance and cried out to Him for healing. Jesus instructed them to go to the priest, who had authority to reinstate them into society. When they all turned in faith to obey Jesus, they were miraculously healed. But only one of the ten, a Samaritan, returned to fall at Jesus’ feet thanking God. This led Jesus to point out the serious lack of praise and gratitude toward God in Israel.

On another occasion, Jesus told a parable about a poor widow to show the rewards of persevering in prayer. (Widows were considered the most helpless people in Palestine at the time.) The poor woman in the story kept bringing her case before a heartless judge, who finally granted her requests just to get rid of her. The principle Jesus pointed out was that if a heartless judge will grant a helpless person’s request, how much more will a loving and merciful God respond to the continual cries of those who persist in faithful prayer.

Jesus told another parable directed at the self-righteous person. A Pharisee and a tax collector were both praying at the temple. The Pharisee thanked God that he was so much better than others while the tax collector begged for God’s mercy on his sinful state. Jesus said the repentant tax collector, not the one who did not recognize his sin, was declared forgiven and righteous by God.

People continually brought their babies to Jesus to touch. Perhaps frustrated by what seemed a senseless intrusion, the disciples rebuked the people for bringing their children. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (18:16). Jesus not only set a standard for respecting and valuing children, but also declared that the Kingdom of God will be made up of people who

have childlike hearts toward Him.

One day a rich ruler came to Jesus with the question, “How can I inherit eternal life?” Knowing what stood between this man and devotion to God, Jesus told him to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Him. The man was downcast, knowing that he was not willing to give up his possessions to follow the Lord. Turning to his disciples, Jesus said it is almost impossible for a rich person to commit his life to God, but by God’s grace anything is possible. Then Jesus promised that anyone who commits all they have to follow the Lord will be repaid a hundred fold in this life as well as experience everlasting joy.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Never Too Late to Pray

Perhaps the leper had long prayed for God to bring healing to his body. Confined to isolation from society, he called out to Jesus to have mercy on him. Years of prayers may have been answered in a moment as he watched his raw diseased flesh become like the skin of a baby. Thrilled to the core of his being, he turned and ran back to fall at Jesus’ feet, thanking Him and praising God.

The rich ruler faced his own inability to let go of his possessions in order to put God first. The disciples said, “It’s too difficult. Who can be saved?” Jesus said, “What is impossible with man is still possible with God.” The rich ruler was not beyond finding freedom from the riches that owned *him*. God’s grace is available to take us beyond our human limitations . . . as we pray.

The widow was helpless in a society that offered no work for women. To make the situation worse, someone had cruelly taken advantage of her. Her pleas for justice fell on the ears of a heartless judge, but she persisted until he gave in to her pleas. How much more will God “who is for us” (Romans 8:31) support us and attend to our needs when we continually come to Him in prayer?

At times, prayer is the only place where we can find peace and grace amidst

the pressures of life. God has designed prayer to be a refuge as we not only express concerns and make requests, but also express thankfulness and faith in God's love and faithfulness.

Jesus taught us "always to pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). Let's examine the biblical principles behind this wonderful teaching.

LESSON 12

ALONG THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM

Luke 18:31-19:44

After this, Jesus took the Twelve aside and once again told them of His imminent death and resurrection. These events, he said, would completely fulfill Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. The disciples still could not understand His words, but Jesus knew that after He was gone they would remember what He had said and be further assured of His deity.

As they continued their journey toward Jerusalem, a blind beggar along the roadside called out to the Lord for mercy. Jesus had the man brought to Him and gave him his sight. He followed Jesus, praising God with all those who witnessed the joyful miracle.

Entering Jericho, the Lord spotted a short man named Zacchaeus who had climbed a tree in order to see Jesus pass. Stopping at that spot, Jesus instructed Zacchaeus to come down so that He might visit his home that day.

Zacchaeus was a wealthy chief tax collector, but Jesus disregarded mutterings about His association with such a man and proceeded to Zacchaeus' home for dinner. There, Zacchaeus joyfully announced his faith and repentance, and Jesus proclaimed that Zacchaeus' faith had brought salvation to him and his household. Rejoicing over Zacchaeus, Jesus reiterated His own purpose for coming to earth as He made the statement that is considered the key verse of the book of Luke: "... the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (19:10).

Back in the streets again, Jesus faced the crowd's strong expectation that an immediate restoration of the kingdom of David would take place

when He, the Messiah, entered Jerusalem. Jesus knew that the prophecy of His earthly kingship would take place at a distant time. To offset the popular expectation, He told the story of a nobleman who left for the capitol city to receive appointment as king of his territory. Before leaving, he gave each of ten servants the equivalent of about three month's wages and instructed them to invest the money for him in his absence. Followed by a delegation that opposed his appointment, the nobleman left and then returned as king.

For each of the faithful servants who had invested his money wisely, the new king gave responsibility over cities. One servant, however, had disregarded the king's orders. The king took the money given this servant and gave it to the one who had brought the highest yield from his investment. The king then had the enemies of his kingship killed (19:14,27).

The parable illustrated how Jesus was going away to receive a kingship and would one day return to establish His kingdom. During His time away, His followers were to fulfill the responsibilities He gave them. The faithful would be rewarded when He returned according to their service. His enemies would be judged before Him.

After this, Jesus made arrangements to humbly enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey colt. As He rode, He was surrounded by many followers who joyfully shouted praises to God for their Messiah's coming. When some religious leaders in the crowd insisted Jesus rebuke His disciples, Jesus replied, "I tell you if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (19:40).

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, He began to weep, knowing that the rejection awaiting Him would eventually result in the terrible downfall of that great center of Hebrew faith.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Discovering Our Gifts

In the parable of the ten minas, the minas given to the servants to invest

refer in part to the unique gifts and abilities that God bestows on each of us. Jesus showed that the one who wisely invests his time, treasure and talent for the Kingdom of God receives praise, reward and the joy of being given greater responsibilities by God.

Let's take a closer look at this great source of purpose and fulfillment in the Christian life.

LESSON 13

CONCLUSION OF PUBLIC DEBATE

Luke 19:45-21:4

Upon entering the temple area, Jesus encountered the dishonest dealings of merchants there. Pilgrims not able to bring appropriate temple sacrifices with them were forced to purchase them in Jerusalem during the Passover, and merchants had introduced an atmosphere of commercialism and graft to the holy temple area. Jesus exercised His authority over His Father's house by driving the merchants out, declaring that God had designed the Temple for prayer, not thievery.

While enraged religious leaders continued to look for a way to kill Him, Jesus continued to teach the people daily in the temple area. Everyone was hanging on His words, and the opposition was desperate in the face of Jesus' popularity. They resorted to asking questions that were designed to trick Him into saying things that might discredit Him in the people's eyes or offend the Roman government. However, such questions only brought about a display of Jesus' wisdom, and His opposition finally withdrew in embarrassment.

As He taught in the temple, Jesus told a parable that depicted the Jewish history of unfaithfulness to God, rejection of His prophets and ultimately of God's own Son. A man who left his vineyard in the hands of farmers went away for a long time. Sending back one servant and then another to obtain some of the fruit of the vineyard, he was angered by the fact that each one was beaten and sent back empty handed. Finally the owner sent his beloved son, thinking surely the farmers would respect the heir of the vineyard.

Instead, they threw the son out of the vineyard and killed him.

The people listening to this parable were appalled, but Jesus urged them to think about Scripture that predicted the rejection of the Messiah (20:17).

Then a Sadducee, who did not believe in life after death, tried to trick Jesus with a question about marriage in heaven. Without hesitation, Jesus told the man that there would be no marriage in heaven. From Old Testament Scripture, Jesus showed proof of life after death, and assured His audience that God knows the souls of both the living and the dead (20:38).

Such an eloquent treatment of the question brought praise even from Jesus' critics, and after this "no one dared to ask Him any more questions"(20:39).

Jesus went on to point out the divinity of the Messiah (Son of David) in the scriptures. God had promised David that the Messiah would be of his lineage, but David referred to that descendant as Lord (Psalm 110:1), eliminating the possibility of the Messiah being just an earthly descendant of David.

As the people listened closely, Jesus also warned them openly about the hypocrisy of the teachers of the law.

A poor widow caught Jesus' eye as she humbly contributed her last penny at the Temple. Touched by this dear woman, the Lord pointed her out to the disciples, saying that her faithful little gift was all she had and was worth more in God's eyes than the larger unsacrificial gifts of others.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Wisdom That Prevails

In contesting Jesus, the religious leaders who sought to trap Him were no match. After jealously tracking His life, Jesus' opposition found miracles, love for people and wisdom too powerful to debate.

So it is today that for those who oppose Jesus, the source of all wisdom, the

deep wisdom of God can be neither successfully debated nor attained. For those who seek Jesus, however, God promises to generously give wisdom that prevails in the challenges of life.

We would probably all like to be thought of by others as wise, but more importantly, godly wisdom gives us “skill at living” as we face everyday pressures. Let’s observe some biblical principles about how to acquire and practice wisdom that prevails.

LESSON 14

TEACHINGS ON THE FUTURE

Luke 21:5-22:38

Jesus continued to teach daily in the temple area during the Passover week. As some of His followers were admiring the magnificent temple, Jesus predicted the total destruction of the beautiful building. The disciples questioned Jesus about when this would happen. In what came to be known as the Olivet Discourse, Jesus prophesied about both the imminent destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the end times before His future second coming.¹ The long period of time before His return to earth would be full of wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, pestilences, false Messiahs, persecution of believers in Christ and, finally, signs in the heavenly bodies and seas that would cause people to panic. The generation that witnessed the last of these events, Jesus said, could be assured of His imminent return. Jesus went on to state that His second coming would be in a glorious and luminous cloud, and no one would question His deity. He advised his followers to be watchful for that unexpected event in order to be ready to stand before Him.

Every day, Jesus continued to teach the crowds who gathered to hear Him at the temple. In the evening, He and the Twelve spent nights on a hill called the Mount of Olives. The chief priests and teachers of the law continued to look for ways to kill Jesus. Motivated by Satan himself, one of the disciples named Judas Iscariot met secretly with Jewish authorities and agreed to hand Jesus over to them when the crowds were not present.

On Thursday, the Lord sent Peter and John into the city to make special

preparations for the Passover meal and last supper with the Twelve. While they reclined at the table together that night, Jesus gave instructions for the sacrament known today as Holy Communion. Sharing the Passover bread and wine with His men, Jesus explained God's new covenant in which redemption would come through His Son's death for sin. To the Jews, the Passover was a constant reminder and proclamation of God's salvation of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Likewise, the practice of Holy Communion would be a reminder and proclamation of the deliverance from sin for all who put faith in Christ's atoning death on the cross.

Then Jesus announced that someone at the table would betray Him, and the men launched into a discussion of who it might be. This discussion led to the recurring debate over who among the Twelve would be the greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus urged them to think in terms of the servant leadership which He had modeled for them. He promised that they would each have such a role in His Kingdom.

Jesus told the disciples that Satan would greatly try them, and that Peter would deny knowing Him three times before the rooster crowed the following morning. Jesus warned them to expect persecution for being His disciples. Then He referred to Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be put to death as a criminal (Isaiah 53:12).

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

In Times of Failure

Jesus' predictions about the future were overwhelming to the disciples. They probably listened with heavy hearts and their typical inability to comprehend the awesome things of which He spoke.

Any of us would relate to their bewilderment, and would hope, as Peter, that we would be faithful to the Lord come what may. However, some of life's challenges in this very unstable world may very well overwhelm our faith.

What is God's attitude toward us in our failures? Where is God when we are vulnerable to unfaithfulness? Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say

about our times of failure.

LESSON 15

ARREST AND TRIAL

Luke 22:39-23:25

Leaving the upstairs room where they had celebrated the Passover meal, Jesus and His twelve disciples went to the Mount of Olives. Although the Lord instructed the Twelve to watch and pray, they fell asleep, physically and emotionally exhausted.

Jesus, however, stepped apart from His disciples and knelt in prayer. He asked that the suffering before Him be removed if possible, but conceded that the will of His Father was the supreme desire of His heart. Jesus was in anguish and alone, and an angel appeared to strengthen Him as He prayed earnestly. Luke recorded that the Lord's sweat was like drops of blood.

Returning to awaken the disciples, Jesus was interrupted by an approaching detachment of soldiers and Jewish officials, led by Judas Iscariot. Judas pointed Jesus out to the authorities by greeting Him with a kiss. One of the disciples reacted to the situation by striking the servant of the high priest and cutting off his ear. But Jesus commanded no violence and immediately healed the man's ear.

Then, seizing Jesus, the soldiers led Him to the high priest's home to await trial early in the morning. Peter followed to the courtyard outside the home. While interacting with people around the courtyard fire, the devoted disciple found himself denying his acquaintance with Jesus three times, just as the Lord had predicted. As the rooster crowed, Jesus looked straight at Peter, who in turn went outside and wept bitterly.

After being mocked and beaten by soldiers, Jesus was questioned at daybreak by the Jewish council of elders. They proceeded to convict Jesus of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death under Jewish Law. Knowing they could not execute the death sentence without Roman authority, they

took Jesus to Pilate to seek a death penalty. Before Pilate, the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of inciting rebellion against Rome; however, Pilate could find no wrong in Jesus. Upon learning He was from Nazareth, Pilate sent Him to Herod, the Roman ruler of the Nazarene district who was in Jerusalem to keep order during the Passover. Herod had wanted to see Jesus for some time, hoping to witness one of His miracles. Jesus remained silent in the face of Herod's questioning while religious leaders stood by shouting accusations. Herod, like Pilate, found Jesus innocent. After ridiculing and mocking Jesus, Herod sent Him back to Pilate.

Overwhelmed by the insistence of the crowds to crucify an innocent man, Pilate agreed to let them choose between Jesus and a dangerous criminal named Barabbas. When the crowd cried louder for the crucifixion of Jesus and the release of Barabbas, Pilate pleaded with them three different times for justice. Finally, overcome by their shouts and exasperated by their irrational behavior, he consented to release Barabbas and crucify Jesus.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Winning the Invisible War

Unfortunately, war is a very real part of history. Modern-day wars shock us into awareness that great powers of destruction and evil exist in our world. The Bible speaks of the source of these evil powers as it exposes another war that has been with us since the beginning. This battle is waged continually in the spiritual realm between the "dominion of darkness" and the "kingdom of light" (Colossians 1:13).

As Satan took control of Judas Iscariot's life and moved to destroy the very Son of God, we see the darkest hour of history . . . an hour "when darkness reigned" (Luke 22:53). Using the pride and selfishness of religious leaders of the day, Satan was able to bring about the brutal death of the Creator of the universe (Colossians 1:16).

Even in this dark hour, however, the Lord Jesus won the battle against the powers of darkness. As He continued to be faithful to God's will, the death Satan planned for Him worked for the salvation of all who would believe.

If we are to know grace under pressure and the ability to handle the challenges of our lives, it is important to know how to win in the spiritual battle that wages around us. Let's look at the biblical principles that promise victory in this "invisible war."*

LESSON 16

THE CROSS

Luke 23:26-56

Roman soldiers led Jesus away to Golgotha, or Calvary, the hill outside the city where Jesus would be crucified. Weakened by the events of the night and early morning, Jesus fell under the weight of the cross, so the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry the wooden structure for Jesus. People pressed in from all sides, and women mourned and wailed as Jesus passed. The Lord told them not to mourn for Him, but for Jerusalem, again alluding to the city's terrible destruction in 70 A.D. resulting from God's abandonment of the unbelieving city.

Two criminals were crucified on either side of the Lord. While soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothes, the Lord prayed for the forgiveness of His enemies. Still adamant against Him, some Jewish leaders sneered and mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross dying. Soldiers joined the mockery, offering him cheap sour wine for His thirst. To mock the Jewish leaders, Pilate had instructed that the sign hung above Jesus' head read: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Pilate refused to acknowledge the Jewish leaders' complaints (John 19:19-22).

The criminal on one side of Jesus hurled insults at Him while the one on the other side humbly asked to go with the Lord to His kingdom. Jesus granted forgiveness to this man and assured him that he would be in paradise with Him that very day.

From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over the land and the curtain of the temple was miraculously torn from top to bottom. Then, in a loud voice, Jesus committed His spirit to His Father and died.

The Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion, seeing all that had happened, was moved to praise God and declare, "Surely this was a righteous man." Many witnesses left, while others who knew Jesus stood at a distance watching as His body was taken down from the cross.

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Council who believed in Jesus and who had not agreed to His crucifixion, had gone to Pilate for permission to take the body of Jesus. He placed it in a new tomb hewn in rock. Seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes and yards of cloth were used to prepare the body that Friday evening before the Sabbath (Saturday). The women had purchased more spices and perfumes to bring back to the tomb on the first day of the week (Sunday).

RESURRECTION MINISTRY

Luke 24

Early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary (the sister of Jesus' mother) and some other women went to the tomb with their prepared spices and perfumes. They found that the huge stone with which the Roman authorities had sealed the tomb (see Matthew 27:62-66) had been moved away from the tomb. As they entered the tomb, they found the body of Jesus missing. While pondering the situation, they were startled by the appearance of two angels who announced that Jesus had risen from the dead as He had promised. Remembering Jesus' promise, the women rushed back to tell the Eleven and the other disciples what they had seen and heard.

The apostles did not believe their words; however, Peter rushed off to the tomb where he found the grave clothes lying empty. Around midday, Jesus came up to two of the disciples who were traveling to the village of Emmaus near Jerusalem. They were prevented from recognizing Jesus, and told Him all that had happened. Beginning with Moses, the Lord explained to them all of the Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messiah that had been fulfilled in the events of which they spoke.

They invited Jesus to join them for dinner when they arrived in Emmaus,

and as the Lord gave thanks and broke the bread, they recognized Him. At this point, Jesus disappeared from their midst. The two disciples rushed back to tell the Eleven apostles in Jerusalem and found out that the Lord had also appeared to Peter during the day.

During the excitement, Jesus appeared in their midst saying, “Peace be with you” (John 20:26). Showing them the scars from the nails of the cross in His hands and feet, the Lord welcomed them to touch Him. They were filled with joy and amazement. After explaining all the Old Testament prophecies about Himself to them, Jesus commissioned them to take the good news of salvation in His name to the world.

Some time later, Jesus led the disciples to a place near Bethany. He blessed them with lifted hands, then ascended into heaven before their very eyes. Filled with joy, the disciples worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ and returned to Jerusalem to continually praise God in the temple.

BUILDING ON THE BASICS

Always Triumphant

Sometimes the seemingly pointless heartaches of life can leave us with a sense of hopelessness. In Christ, however, there is always hope. The promises of God and the death and resurrection of Christ allow believers to triumph, as did the Savior Himself, regardless of what life may bring.

One of the main themes of the book of Luke is *joy*. We will conclude our study with reasons why we can be joyous in any and every challenge of life.

One Solitary Life

“Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty and then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His feet inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He

had no credentials but Himself.

“While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth while He was dying, and that was His coat. When He was dead He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

“Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

“I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that one solitary life.”

Author Unknown

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