KNOWING FOR SURE

Volume 2 (Chapters 11–24)

A 13-LESSON STUDY

REFORMED EXPOSITORY BIBLE STUDY

JON NIELSON

and PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN

LUKE

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P&R PUBLISHING
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

Unless otherwise indicated, boxed quotations are taken from Philip Graham Ryken's *Luke*, vol. 2, in the Reformed Expository Commentary series, and the page numbers in these quotations refer to that source.

The boxed quotations in lessons 1 and 2 are taken from volume 1 of Philip Graham Ryken's *Luke*, in the same series, and their page numbers (and accompanying volume number) refer instead to that source.

The quoted phrase in the boxed quotation on page 43 is from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 2:111.

ISBN: 978-1-62995-844-6 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-62995-845-3 (ePub)

Printed in the United States of America

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God's Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage's main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible's message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series
Author of *Luke* (REC)

INTRODUCING LUKE

Luke is the third and longest of the biblical Gospels. Its **main purpose** is to provide a true and orderly account of Christ's life, ministry, sufferings, death, and resurrection so that people who read the book "may have certainty concerning the things" (Luke 1:4) that it teaches about the Savior who came "to seek and to save the lost" (19:10). In other words, the gospel of Luke was written to strengthen our faith in Jesus and to give us greater assurance of the salvation he brings.

"The Gospel of Knowing for Sure," as we might call it, is named for the man who wrote it: "Luke the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14). Dr. Luke, who accompanied the apostle Paul on some of his famous missionary journeys, happens to be the only New Testament **author** who was not a Jew but a Greek. His careful attention to detail, tender compassion for people who suffer, and evident fascination with healing miracles all reflect his calling to the medical profession. Like many good Christian doctors, Luke was an everyday evangelist who wanted everyone he met to know more about Jesus. A gifted historian as well as a skilled physician, he penned not one but two best sellers—the New Testament book of Acts also bears his signature. In his gospel, Luke wrote down "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Then, in the book of Acts, he told the rest of the story, portraying the good news of Jesus Christ being proclaimed all over the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke addressed both his gospel and its sequel to a person whom he calls "most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3; see also Acts 1:1). Because he is given this honorific title ("most excellent"), some notable scholars maintain that Theophilus was a high-ranking Roman official. Since Luke's purpose behind what he wrote to Theophilus was to give greater assurance concerning the truth about Jesus, presumably this important leader was at

least somewhat familiar with Christianity but wanted to learn more. Others believe that Luke wrote for Theophilus the son of Ananias, who became high priest in Jerusalem several years after Jesus died and rose again. But even though he was writing to a specific individual, Luke also had a more general **audience** in mind. The name *Theophilus* means "friend of God" or "lover of God." If we are friends of God through our loving faith in Jesus Christ, then this gospel was written for us as much as it was written for anyone.

Our understanding of Luke's audience makes a difference regarding how we understand the book's **context**. Was Luke writing to a Jew or a Gentile? To a religious leader in Jerusalem or to a Roman official in a city like Antioch—or even Rome itself? When we read this gospel, we discover that Luke provides sufficient information about daily life in ancient Galilee and religious customs in biblical Jerusalem for us to be able to understand Christ's life and ministry within their original setting.

Luke begins his account of Christ's public ministry with Jesus's first sermon, which he preached at his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. The book's **key verse** comes from Jesus's quotation from the Old Testament book of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19; cf. Isa. 61:1–2). Once he had read these words aloud, Jesus sat down and calmly said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). By saying this, he was claiming to be the Savior whom God had always promised to send—the one who would preach good news to poor sinners and would bring healing for every wound and freedom from every form of bondage. As the rest of the gospel story unfolds, we will see Jesus actively carry out the exact kind of ministry that Isaiah foretold—one that was "mighty in deed and word" (24:19). He will heal the sick, give sight to the blind, set captives free from spiritual bondage, and—most of all—preach the good news of forgiveness for sin.

Many scholars have identified spiritual themes and specific episodes within the life of Christ that are unique to Luke's gospel. Luke gives us the fullest account of Jesus's birth and boyhood—one that includes four of the first Christmas carols. Of the gospel writers, he provides the most complete record of the healing ministry that Jesus exhibited as the Great

Physician. He tells more stories about forgiveness and places a special focus on prayer—eleven of the fifteen prayers of Jesus that are recorded in the Bible are included in Luke's gospel. He also retells nearly twenty parables about the kingdom of God that do not appear in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, or John—including many that deal with the stewardship of money and treat it as an important spiritual issue. And he takes special notice of the women who supported Jesus and were blessed by his ministry.[1]

As we encounter these varied episodes from the life of Christ, what **theological themes** can we discern within Luke's gospel? By providing the fullest account of our Savior's nativity—which includes the beautiful songs that men, women, and angels sang to celebrate his miraculous birth in Bethlehem—this gospel helps us to understand the mystery of the *incarnation*. Luke's down-to-earth presentation of the life of Christ generally emphasizes our Savior's humanity. But, paradoxically, his favorite title for Jesus—"Son of Man"—is an Old Testament term that bears witness to his deity.

Luke has even more to say about the death of Christ than he does about the birth of Christ. As do the other gospels, this one pays disproportionate attention to the last week of our Savior's life, when unrelenting opposition to his ministry intensified his sufferings and resulted in his bloody crucifixion. Luke wants us to understand the doctrine of the *atonement*—the truth that, by dying in our place, Jesus paid the price of our sins and reconciled us to God.

We should also see Luke as a theologian of the Holy Spirit—especially when we take into account the second part of his two-volume masterpiece: the book of Acts. The good doctor was interested in what theologians call *pneumatology*: the study of the person and work of the third member of the Trinity. From the moment he was baptized in the Jordan River through the moment he walked out of the empty tomb, Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

One more area to mention that Luke's theology encompasses is *missiology*, which relates to the church's calling to proclaim the gospel to the

1. In order to maximize the time we spend on some of the passages and episodes that are unique to Luke's gospel and tied to these central themes, this study will not include an in-depth examination of *every* passage in the book. At times, you will be encouraged to read some sections of his gospel without answering specific questions about them.

whole world. During his life on earth, Jesus preached the good news to as many needy people as he could: poor shepherds, lonely widows, crooked businessmen, despised lepers, and foreigners who were outside the family of faith. As he reached out to people who were lost, Jesus was beginning to fulfill the prophecy that had been issued at his birth that he would bring salvation to "all peoples"—to Gentiles as well as to Jews (2:31; see also 32). This work would continue through his disciples, whom he commissioned to preach "repentance for the forgiveness of sins . . . to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (24:47).

Every aspect of Luke's theology is designed not only to give us greater certainty about Christ's saving work but also to draw us deeper into the life of costly Christian discipleship. The most important **practical application** of his gospel we can make is simply to trust its message of salvation and to believe in Jesus. But that is not Luke's only objective for us: he also wants us to take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

One of Luke's favorite literary and pastoral techniques is to set two characters in contrast in order to demonstrate the true and best way to follow Jesus. Luke gives us two dinner guests, Simon and a sinful woman, along with opposite assessments of their spiritual condition (see 7:36–50); two sisters, Mary and Martha, who take different postures toward spiritual instruction (see 10:38–42); two brothers, younger and older, who were both far from their father's heart—but in very different ways (see 15:11–32); two neighbors from two different tax brackets, the rich man and poor Lazarus, who reached totally different eternal destinations (16:19–31); two men who went to the temple to pray, a Pharisee and a tax collector—only one of whom had a right standing with God (18:9–14); and so on.

True Christian disciples care for the same kinds of people whom Jesus treated with compassion. And if our Savior was both a healer of the body and a physician of the soul, then we too are called both to meet the material needs of our neighbors and to share the good news that may lead them to eternal life. By showing us how completely Jesus transformed the lives of the people he saved—how he liberated many people who were marginalized, oppressed, and underprivileged—Luke helps us to see the social implications of the gospel. The Savior whose miracles demonstrated his power over demons, disease, death, and the devil also calls us to see salvation in all its dimensions and to seek the lost by becoming the friends of sinners.

The gospel of Luke is not some tightly organized treatise but an evangelistic biography that tells many different stories about Jesus. Simply by reading the book from beginning to end, we get drawn into the narrative flow of the birth, life, ministry, sufferings, death, and triumphant resurrection of Jesus. But Luke also leaves us some clues to the fact that he has given careful thought to his book's structure. A crucial moment comes near the end of chapter 9, where Luke tells us that "when the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (v. 51). From that point forward, Christ resolutely set his course toward the cross.

The overall movement of the book is also indicated by Jesus's statement of purpose to Zacchaeus the tax collector: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). We see Jesus *seeking* the lost from the beginning of his public ministry, when he seeks out his first disciples and begins preaching the good news of the kingdom to the lost souls of Israel. The stories we see in chapter 15 about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons are really about his loving pursuit of every lost sinner. By the end of Luke's gospel we also see Jesus *saving* the lost—specifically by dying for their sins and rising again. We catch an early glimpse of this saving work when he tells Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:9). And his salvation is more fully displayed on the cross, when he welcomes the thief who is dying on the cross next to him into paradise (see 23:32–43). As we read these gospel stories, Jesus is looking to find us, too—and then to save us forever.

With these key moments in mind, here is one helpful way for us to **outline** the gospel of Luke:

Prologue: Luke's Purpose (1:1–4)

The Advent of the Son of Man
- Birth of Jesus (1:5–2:21)
- Boyhood of Jesus (2:22–52)
- Baptism of Jesus (3:1–38)
- Temptation of Jesus (4:1–13)

The Ministry of the Son of Man
- Jesus Begins His Ministry (4:14–44)

Jesus Calls His Disciples (5:1–6:16)
Jesus Teaches and Performs Miracles (6:17–8:56)
Jesus Commissions His Disciples (9:1–50)

The Mission of the Son of Man on his Way to the Cross
Jesus in Samaria (9:51–10:37)
Jesus in Bethany and Judea (10:38–13:21)
Jesus Journeys to Jerusalem (13:22–17:10)
Jesus between Samaria and Galilee (17:11–18:34)
Jesus near Jericho (18:35–19:27)

The Death of the Son of Man
Triumphal Entry (19:28–44)
Temple Discourses (19:45–21:38)
Last Supper (22:1–38)
Betrayal, Arrest, and Trials (22:39–23:25)
Crucifixion and Burial (23:26–56)

The Triumph of the Son of Man
Resurrection Day (24:1–49)
Ascension Day (24:50–53)

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LESSON 1

JESUS THE TEACHER

Luke 11:1–12:12

THE BIG PICTURE

As we begin our study of the second part of Luke's gospel, we come to an extended section of Jesus's collected teachings. These teachings cover a variety of subjects, but we will see them raising a key contrast, throughout, between the path of *humble discipleship* and *hypocritical religiosity*. Jesus gently instructs his humble disciples as he calls them to pray, witness boldly, and have confidence in the Father's care. He also firmly rebukes the hypocritical religious leaders as he calls them out for their outward displays of religion, which mask hearts that reject God as well as others.

Jesus begins by teaching his disciples about prayer—he gives them a *model* for how to pray (often called the "Lord's Prayer") and then offers them an invitation to pray *boldly* as children of God (11:1–13). We then see Luke recording an example of the ongoing authority that Jesus has over evil spirits, which Jesus explains is evidence that the Son of God has truly entered the world (11:14–26).

The passage then highlights the contrast between Jesus's disciples and religious hypocrites, as Jesus speaks of the blessing that comes to those who repent and believe when they hear his Word as well as the judgment that comes to those who reject it (11:27–36). He goes on to issue a series of proclamations of woe and judgment on the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, who heap heavy religious burdens on others while harboring hearts that are far from God and devoid of genuine love for those who are

in need (11:37–12:3). The passage ends as Jesus again addresses his faithful disciples and prepares them to encounter persecution and hardship as well as to be able to witness boldly in the midst of trial (12:4–12).

Read Luke 11:1–12:12.

GETTING STARTED

1. What are some of the biggest struggles that you face in your prayer life? What about prayer is most difficult for you? What experiences or emotions have characterized times of strong and fervent prayer during your life?

2. Why is it so easy for Christians to focus on outward appearances of religiosity? In what ways are you tempted to put on a spiritual *show* while hiding what's really going on in your inner life and heart?

The Way God Sees Us, pg. 1:629

The gospel . . . helps us see ourselves the way God sees us, so that it no longer matters very much what other people think. The hypocrite is always desperate for more recognition, but the gospel convinces us that nothing we do for God has any merit of its own. We want to see ourselves the way God sees us: as forgiven sinners, accepted in Christ.

OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. Throughout this passage, what right attitudes and actions does Jesus say should characterize his disciples? What attitude should they have toward God—especially as they pray to him?

4. List some hypocritical behaviors that Jesus identifies throughout the second half of Luke 11. What is Jesus's attitude regarding this kind of hypocrisy?

5. What does Jesus say throughout this passage about the suffering and hardship that his followers can expect? What encouragement does he offer them for times when they are in the midst of hardship—and even persecution?

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. Why do you think one of Jesus's disciples asked him how to pray (11:1)? What should we, as his followers today, learn from his own habits of prayer that are described in the Gospels? How would you expound on

the main points, or petitions, contained within the brief prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in 11:2–4?

7. What approach to God does Jesus urge his disciples to take when they pray (11:5–13)? What understanding of God does this approach rest on—and what makes this so encouraging for us as God's children?

8. What, according to Jesus's own words, does the authority that he has over demons and evil spirits communicate about his identity (11:14–23)? What does he say to refute the arguments and criticisms that are issued against his powerful ministry?

Our Generous King, pg. 1:591

Our Father God loves to be a King to us in giving: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). God has given us his generous invitation, offering us everything we need in Jesus Christ. The question is whether we will go to him and ask for what we need, seeking and knocking until he answers.

9. What does Jesus say in 11:27–28 is the path to ultimate blessing? Based on the example of Nineveh, what is the relationship between belief and repentance (11:29–32)? Why, according to him, will the men of Nineveh serve as "witnesses" against those of his generation who reject him and his gospel?

10. Note the context that 11:37–38 provides for the extended words of woe and warning that Jesus speaks against the scribes and the Pharisees. How does he respond when the lawyer tells him in 11:45 that he has offended his fellow teachers of the law? What are some of the central accusations that Jesus levels against the scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers?

11. What does Jesus's tone throughout 11:37–12:3 tell us about his attitude regarding hypocrisy as well as religion that is merely an outward show? What shift takes place in his tone when he speaks to his disciples about how his presence will be with them when they are arrested and oppressed (12:4–12)?

BIBLE CONNECTIONS

12. Read Acts 5:1–11, in which Luke describes the hypocrisy and sin of Ananias and Sapphira as well as the judgment they receive from God.

What similarities do you see between the lesson God teaches the early church through their example and the woes and warnings Jesus has been teaching in the passage that we are studying?

13. As Stephen's death drew near, the angry crowd looked at him and observed that his face was like "the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Stephen then proceeded to speak one of the most eloquent and piercing sermons in church history . . . just before he was stoned to death (Acts 7:2–60). Where do you see, throughout the account of his death, the beautiful fulfillment of what Jesus says to his disciples in Luke 12:4–12?

THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. Prayer, according to answer 98 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, is "an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies." How does this definition support Jesus's teaching from Luke 11:1–13? Why should an understanding that God is our *Father* strengthen our confidence as we approach him in prayer?

15. Philip Ryken writes of the boldness of the Scottish Reformer John Knox and notes that someone remarked of Knox, upon his death, "Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of man."[1] How might Luke 12:4–12 have served to inspire men and women like John Knox throughout church history—especially when they faced suffering and death for the sake of the gospel? What effect do these promises from Jesus have on you today?

APPLYING THE TEXT

16. How can Jesus's teaching from this passage shape, change, and form your prayer life? Which aspects of your prayer life are most in need of growth? What foundational truths about prayer should motivate you to come before God?

17. As you consider your path of discipleship under Jesus, what about this passage most encourages you? What part of Jesus's teaching convicts you the most?

1. Quoted in William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 164, which is quoted in Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, vol. 1, *Chapters 1–12* (Phillipsburg, NJ: 2009), 648.

18. How can Jesus's warnings about the purely *outward* righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees serve to guide your own walk with God? What sins might these warnings be calling you to confess—both to God and to others in your community of faith?

PRAYER PROMPT

As you close a lesson that is full of rich teachings and warnings from Jesus, pray that God would give you a heart that is humble and soft to receive his Son and his Word. Ask him to guard you, through his Spirit, against the temptation to be hypocritical, judgmental, and legalistic. Pray that he would form in you a childlike faith and strengthen you to walk the path of discipleship no matter what trouble, suffering, or persecution it brings your way.

A Pure Heart for Jesus, pg. 1:630

This is what the gospel does. It gives you true spiritual life, so that you are no longer dead inside, but wonderfully, vitally alive. It delivers you from the hypocrisy of external religiosity and pretentious piety, so that you can live with a clean, pure heart for Jesus. Only this kind of heart can offer the life of Christ to anyone else.