

THE REAL JESUS: WHO'S WHO

Week Three | April 22, 2018 | Meet Luke [Part 3]

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 1:1–4 and 2 Timothy 4:9–11. Pray that God, through His Holy Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Friendship is a powerful way we can help others encounter the “real Jesus.”

THEOLOGY APPLIED

We were designed to need and long for friendship. True friendship is not based on mutual hobbies, interests or seasons of life. Instead, it arises when we help each other see Jesus more clearly and know Him better.

MEDITATE

“... through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13b).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

- Q: *Do you feel you need lots of friends, a few good friends, or no friends at all?*
- Q: *Describe your ideal friend. What would they be like? How would they treat you? What qualities would they have?*
- Q: *What is the greatest thing a friend has ever done for you?*

After God created the world, He called it “good.” But when Adam was created in Genesis 2, for the first time God said something was “not good.” It was not good for Adam to be alone. Remember, sin entered the world in Genesis 3. That means there was something before sin that was not good. Adam was not created to be alone, to be companionless. Tim Keller says, “Adam was lonely not because he was imperfect, but because he was perfect. The ache for friendship is the one ache that is not the result of sin.”

Because of sin, friendship has become a lost art. We all long to have genuine friends, but we don’t know how to get them or how to be one. We know how to cross paths with people, chitchat, or do an activity together. But it’s hard to find someone who will truly serve your soul. In his book, *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis suggests that friendship is focused on the central question, “Do you see the same truth?” Maybe you have someone to whom you could say, “Do you see the same TV screen?” or “Do you see that platter of loaded nachos?” In fact, Lewis says, “Friendship...is born in the moment when one man says to another ‘What! You too? I thought that no one but myself...’” But the deepest, most genuine friendships are not the ones built on a common hobby or a mutual season of life, but on a pursuit of truth. True friends point each other to truth and are willing to go to great lengths to do so. This is the kind of friend Luke is to Theophilus.

In the last two weeks we have been getting to know Luke. We first met Luke the physician and saw how he leveraged his vocation, experience, and resources for the kingdom. Then, we met Luke the historian and theologian. We saw how he uses both history and theology to help us not just know facts about Jesus, but to encounter Him.

This week we will meet Luke the friend. We will see what great lengths he goes to so his friend, Theophilus, might see the same truth he does. We will also see the kind of friend he was to Paul. Though Theophilus was a seeker and Paul was a brother, Luke demonstrated selfless care and sacrificial service to them both in a way that pointed them to the “real Jesus.”

Q: *Can you think of a time when a friend helped you see Jesus more clearly?*

Q: *What is the bond in your current friendships? What do you talk about most? What do you do together most?*

Q: *How does sin destroy friendships? How have you seen it damage friendships you have had?*

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. BEING A FRIEND TO THEOPHILUS

2. BEING A FRIEND TO PAUL

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

BEING A FRIEND TO THEOPHILUS

■ LUKE 1:1-4

Q: *List all Luke did for Theophilus. Discuss how much labor, sacrifice, and time was involved.*

Q: *If someone did something like this for you, how would you respond?*

In his introduction, Luke addresses his gospel account to its recipient, Theophilus. The name Theophilus means “lover of God” or “friend of God.” Luke calls him “most excellent,” which is a title typically used to refer to nobility. Most scholars believe Theophilus was either a government official or an influential citizen. He was a person of position, influence, and power. From the text, it is unclear if Theophilus was a Christian struggling with doubt or a seeker standing on the threshold of faith. Either way, we know that the person and significance of Jesus was heavy on his mind. He was a pursuer of God, a lover of the truth. There was something about Theophilus’ story and his spiritual journey that drew Luke to him. For Luke, the greatest thing in the world is to encounter Jesus, and he wants his friend to be able to do so with confidence and assurance.

They may have had other things in common, but we know Luke and Theophilus both had a love for the truth. Spiritual friendships lead to friendship with God. Instead of being satisfied with scratching the surface, they wanted to dig deep. They wanted to know what truly mattered, what made life worth living, and how to believe in what is true. Instead of finding easier things to talk about or ignoring spiritual conversations that can be uncomfortable or expose vulnerability, Luke and Theophilus—two men!—built their friendship around a love of truth. Maybe you think spiritual friendships are things women have, but here we learn they are what all people are created to need. Above all else, Luke cared about his friend’s spiritual condition, and he was willing to do whatever was needed to encourage his soul. That’s a true friend.

- ♀: *Discuss this quote by Aelred of Rievaulx: “Friendship bears fruit in this life and the next.”*
- ♀: *Think of your friends who do not yet know Christ. What are practical ways you can seek the good of their soul above all else?*
- ♀: *Discuss genuine friendship versus fake friendship. What do you think are the differences?*

BEING A FRIEND TO PAUL

■ 2 TIMOTHY 4:9-11

Q: *Why did Demas desert Paul?*

Q: *How does Luke stand in contrast to Paul's other friends?*

Paul was a man well acquainted with suffering. For the sake of the gospel he experienced imprisonments, beatings, trials, and many near-death experiences. In 2 Corinthians 11:24–28 he writes,

“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

For at least two years, Luke stayed by Paul's side. Even when he was in jail, Luke faithfully visited Paul. Even when he was under house arrest, Luke was present. As we noted in week 1, when Paul was sick or suffering from physical beatings, Luke, his beloved physician, cared for him. When all others deserted him, Luke stayed by his side. The apostle Paul was one of the most godly men who ever lived, and he needed friends!

The need for friendship is a God-given one. Far from being a sign of weakness, it is a sign of health and maturity. Paul was not so theologically astute that he did not need to hear words of truth from Luke or sense the presence of Christ through Luke's presence. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”

Luke served Theophilus by talking with him about spiritual questions and providing an orderly account to show that Jesus was not a myth or a madman, but a real Savior. Luke served Paul by being present with him in joy and sorrow and by taking care of his physical needs. Every mention of Luke in the Bible indicates that he was a person who cared for people's well-being. He was a friend who sought to bring healing and wholeness physically, mentally, and spiritually. We see in his gospel that Luke gives special attention to the welfare of the poor, women, children, and the social outcast. Luke is a methodical scholar, a careful listener, a skilled physician, and a thoughtful friend.

Luke cares for his friends the way God cares for us. God looks to all our needs: spiritual, intellectual, and physical. He calls us to worship Him with our whole beings, and to do so in community with others. Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in time of need.” These times of need could be dark spiritual times

or intellectual seasons of doubt or hurt. They could also be seasons of sickness and pain. But in every kind of storm, God is near. He is our help. He gives us strength. But He often does this through the physical presence, help, and strength of our brothers and sisters.

As we offer our presence, our help, and our support to others, we become the hands and feet of Christ. We point our friends to the God who is their ultimate help. In Galatians 6:10, Paul writes, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” It would be interesting to know how much Luke influenced Paul’s understanding of friendship, or if he came to mind when Paul was writing these words. Luke was a model of someone who sought the well-being of everyone, both those who were on the threshold of faith and those who were the chief proponents of the faith.

🕒: *Describe a time when you were going through a trial and the physical presence of a friend encouraged you. How and why do you think it was so edifying?*

🕒: *How does Luke’s care for his friends reflect the way God cares for us?*

🕒: *How does Luke’s care for his friends offer them dignity and respect?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

🕒: *Do you feel your need for friendships? Do you interpret that need as a sign of weakness?*



🕒: *Do you long for spiritual friendships, or does the thought of that make you want to run the other direction? Why or why not?*

- Q: *How can you become a friend like Luke? Think of your current friends. How can you care for them spiritually? How can you care for them physically?*
- Q: *How can you be cared for by your friends?*
- Q: *In a world of individualism, how is a life focused on caring for the well-being of others so radical? What does it look like practically?*
- Q: *Discuss the following quote: "I don't need friends, all I need is Jesus."*
- Q: *How are friendships centered on Christ different from friendships based on other things?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- God, thank You that Your Word gives us models of people who were changed by Your grace and walked in newness of life. Use Luke's example to give me a clearer vision of the gift of friendship and how it helps us know the real Jesus more deeply.
- Father, forgive me for thinking I either don't need other people or desiring other people for self-centered reasons. Make me aware of my self-centeredness so I can be free to be others-centered.
- Holy Spirit, give me the wisdom and discernment to choose wise and godly friends with whom I can cultivate genuine spiritual friendships. Help me be the kind of friend I long for.
- Jesus, thank You that, because of Your work on the cross, I am no longer an enemy of God, but I am seated with You at the table. Thank You that sin and death have been defeated so it is possible for me to have genuine friendships with others.



**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), Spiritual Friendship by Aelred of Rievaulx, and Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.*