



The Gospel of
NOBODIES

JESUS AS LUKE SAW HIM

Lent 2022

A Study Guide for Individual or Group Use



UNIVERSITY
CHRISTIAN
CHURCH
UniversityChristian.org

OPEN MINDS. LOVING HEARTS.

During this season of Lent, our congregation is embarking on a journey together through the Gospel of Luke. This Study Guide is for individual and small group use.

You are encouraged to read the daily scripture passages and journal your responses to the reflection questions. Groups should reserve time for discussion of the study/reflection questions as well.

We pray that whatever pattern of study you choose, the Holy Spirit will weave God's Word into your life and heart.

The Night Shift Workers

March 7 - 12, 2022

NOTE: Using different Bible translations may be helpful for these readings. For groups, reading aloud from the Common English Bible or The Message may help to clarify the meaning of some passages.

MONDAY Luke 1:1-38 – Two earth-shaking announcements

Luke described how carefully he had studied Jesus' story. He emphasized that he (as well as earlier gospel writers) relied on eyewitness testimony. Luke may have spoken with some additional witnesses, because his gospel was the only one that began with an angel announcing that aged Elizabeth would bear Jesus' forerunner, while young Mary would give birth to the Savior himself.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Seldom if ever do angels appear to us as they did in these stories. Do you listen for God's voice? Do you believe that God speaks to us? In what way does God speak? Do you recognize it when it happens and do you accept it as God's voice? Are there ways for us to confirm it?
- Is God calling you to do anything during this season of Lent? The Scriptures repeatedly say, "Don't be afraid". Does God help us to face and deal constructively with our fears?
- Does the thought of God taking a direct hand in your life feel at all frightening to you? In what part of your life do you most need to hear God's message, "Do not be afraid"?

PRAYER

Loving God, for this collection of stories titled Luke and for its writer, I give you thanks. Give me an understanding, worshipping heart as I read this gospel. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 1:39-66 – In Elizabeth and Mary's culture, women were second-class citizens. No male leader of her day (let alone an angel) would have greeted this woman of almost no status by saying, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." So Mary sang that God lifts up the lowly. She and Elizabeth were living examples—a childless older woman and a single teen from a backwater town, both given key roles in God's saving plan.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Why would God have chosen an older, childless woman and a single teen as key players in the saving plan for humankind? Before this happened to them, would either woman have imagined her role would be so important?
- Do you think God has a plan for you? Can you imagine what it is? Are you ready for whatever God sends your way? How can we best prepare ourselves for any plan God has for us?
- Re-read verse 58. Do you have supportive people around you who would help you when you feel challenged? Are you willing to support others in a similar way?
- When has someone affirmed you by noticing God at work in your life? When have you encouraged someone else? Who can you affirm and encourage today?

PRAYER

God, you worked out your plan through ordinary people like Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary. That gives me hope. Help me follow you in whatever you have in mind for me. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 1:67-2:20 – God Lifts Up the Lowly

Zechariah's song praised God for raising up the mighty Savior John would herald. Then the "mighty Savior" arrived—as a poor infant announced to night-shift shepherds, and laid in a manger in a stable; lying on a bed of straw where the animals ate.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Does it seem strange to you that God would choose a poor family to protect and provide for Jesus? Why wouldn't he have chosen a rich family?
- Why would God choose to alert lowly shepherds to the birth of this miraculous child? Why do God's values seem so different from society's values? Are our own, personal values more in sync with those of God or of our culture?
- God imparted a "revelation" to the shepherds. What are some of the main ways God reveals truth to you? In what ways have you learned to trust God's revelation, while also using the power of thought and analysis God has given you?

PRAYER

God of Life, thank you for the good news of Jesus' birth, for me, and for all people. Help me this day to live in a spirit of gratitude for your great gift of the Christ. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 2:21-52 – The Challenge, and the Cost, of Parenting the Messiah

Luke described Simeon and Anna, two elderly servants of God who recognized in the infant Jesus the hope for which they had been waiting. Simeon warned Mary that her life would hold pain as well as joy. Then Luke told about Jesus' first Passover, at which he showed a precocious insight into the things of God, while Mary and Joseph experienced a foretaste of the pain and puzzlement they would face at times as their extraordinary son grew up.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- What was it that Simeon and Anna saw in the infant Jesus that others couldn't see? What allowed them this insight?
- What might have made raising Jesus difficult for his parents? How did Jesus try to make it less difficult for them? Did being the parents of Jesus require them to make adjustments to their thinking and their lives?
- As you reflect on your own story, in what ways has your loyalty to Jesus brought challenges and adjustments into your life? Have you found facing those challenges for Jesus' sake worth it?
- In what ways did the story of Jesus' first Passover foreshadow how effective Jesus would be when, about 18 years later, he began preaching and teaching?

PRAYER

Guiding God, thank you for the courage, commitment and sensitivity to you that brought Mary and Joseph to their amazing life calling. Shape me into a person who reflects your love in all my relationships. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 3:1-22 – The Baptizing Forerunner and the Baptized Messiah

Nearly four hundred years had gone by with no clear prophetic voice in Israel. When John the Baptist began preaching, forcefully and urgently calling people to change their lives, he drew crowds hungry for a word from God. He baptized people as a symbol of cleansing and change. Faithful to his life mission, he pointed beyond himself and had the privilege of baptizing the Savior whose way he'd prepared.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- John felt a sense of urgency in baptizing repentant people before Jesus began his ministry. Do you feel any sense of urgency to strengthen and act upon your faith? What steps can be taken to keep us on that path of faith?
- John the Baptist did not baptize people as an end in itself. He was preparing the way for Jesus. What can we as a community do to prepare the way for Jesus Christ and the completion of his mission? How are you preparing the way for Christ to work in your life? In the lives of others?

PRAYER

Jesus, help me to see clearly your call on my life. Give me the courage and conviction of John the Baptist in living out that calling and following where you lead. Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 3:23-4:13 – Jesus' Identity Clarified

For readers today, the lists of names and relationships are probably the most “so what?” parts of the Bible. But Luke made a key point with his genealogy, seen if we put it side by side with the list in Matthew 1. Matthew started Jesus' lineage with Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation. Luke came (verse 34) to Jacob, Isaac, Abraham—but went right on, all the way to “the son of Adam, the son of God.” The genealogy highlighted the sense of identity Jesus carried into his temptations. By saying “IF you are the Son of God,” the tempter asked, in effect, “Do you know who you are?” Because Jesus knew, he refused the temptation to try to prove his identity in self-serving ways.

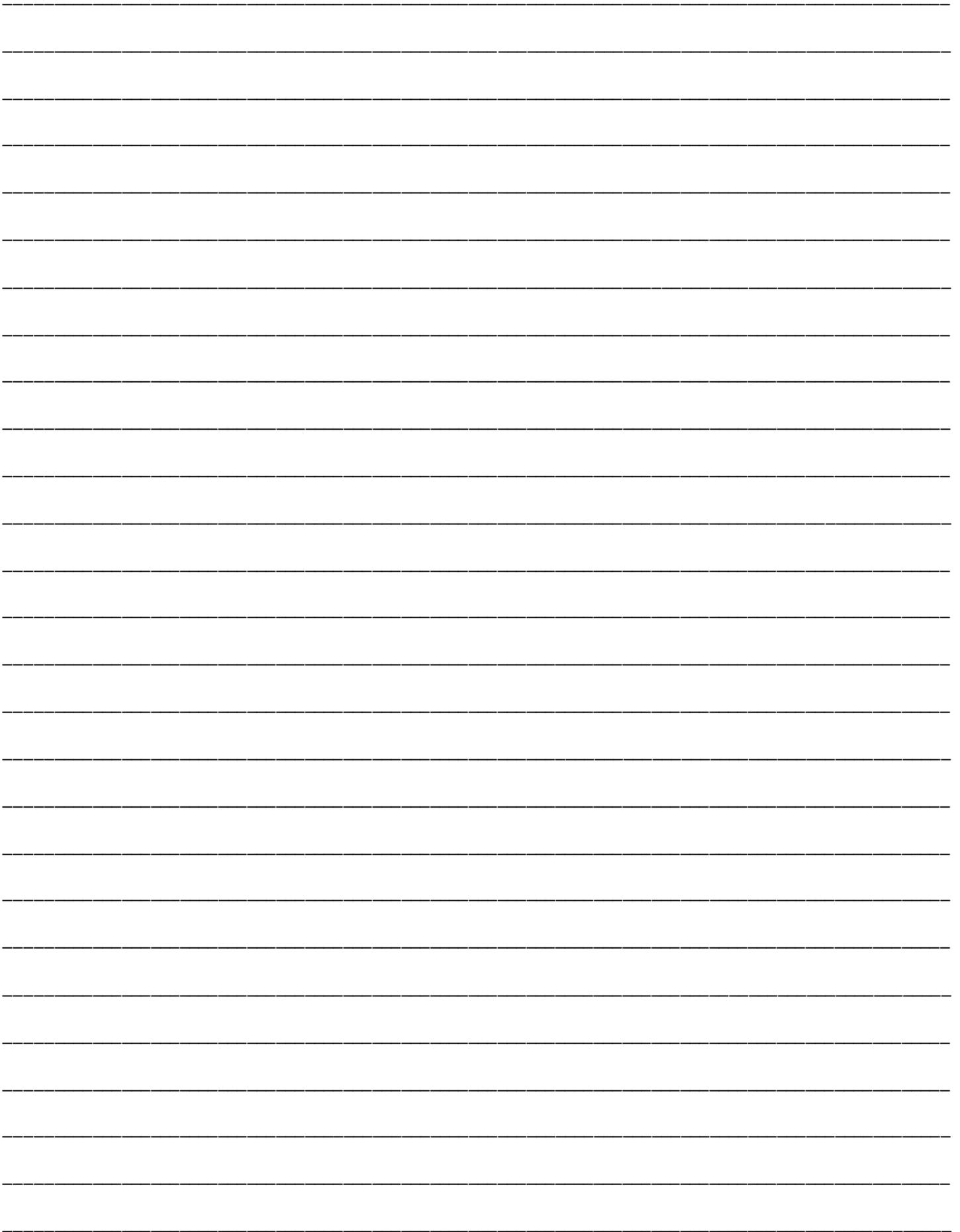
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Despite the power of the temptations, Jesus refused to bow to the human tendency to serve ourselves. Instead, he did what he had to do to serve God only. How are we similarly tempted in our own lives?
- Who do we tend to serve with our actions and attitudes? What can we do to counteract those tendencies to serve ourselves?
- Was there ever a time when a desire to please others drew you away from God's purpose for your life? What steps help you keep focused and faithful despite any pressures you face?
- Do you have any suggestions that might help others who face powerful temptations?

PRAYER

Jesus, son of God, I face temptations every day. Plant the principles of your word firmly in my heart, that, like you, I might stay on God's path and resist the lure of going my own way. Amen.

IN THE COMING WEEK... prayerfully consider all the "invisible people," many of whom do thankless but essential work for our benefit. Make a special effort to extend your thanks and kindness to all of those who do this work and who may seldom receive any recognition. Journal your experiences and/or share them with your group.



The Disabled and Sick

March 14 - 19, 2022

NOTE: Using different Bible translations may be helpful for these readings. For groups, reading aloud from the Common English Bible or The Message may help to clarify the meaning of some passages.

MONDAY Luke 4:14-44 – **Jesus Announced Good News to the Poor**

In Nazareth, Jesus defined his mission by claiming that God was fulfilling the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 through Jesus' healing, liberating actions. There he met rejection and anger. In Capernaum, on the other hand, the townspeople wanted him to stay there and be their local healer (verse 42). But Jesus steadfastly followed a course that he and God chose. He did not allow either human popularity or rejection to govern his actions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- What were the people thinking when they said, "This is Joseph's son, isn't it?" What was it that made them angry (verse 28)?
- Why did Jesus address both physical and spiritual issues?
- What reason did Luke give for Jesus silencing the demons?
- What made it important, in verse 42, for Jesus to go to "a deserted place"?
- What drawbacks does constant attention seem to have? When do you need "alone time"? How important is it? How do you carve out that time?
- Solitude—just you and God—is hard for most of us. How could you create fifteen minutes of solitude each day by design? How might you occasionally find longer periods of solitude?

PRAYER

Jesus, you were (and are) so much more than just "Joseph's son." Help me to find and value time alone with you. Nourish my spirit as I practice the same discipline you practiced here on earth. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 5:1-32 – **Healing the Hurting; Calling Followers**

Luke (probably Paul's companion called "the dearly loved physician" in Colossians 4:14) catalogued many different ills Jesus healed. No wonder people were "filled with awe" (verse 26)—clearly an awe-inspiring spiritual power was at work in Jesus. And it's important to know that in Jesus' day, illness was not just physical—many people thought it was a sign of God's curse. Jesus' healing acts bore powerful witness to God's forgiveness and love, as well as God's power.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Healing often involves the physical, emotional and spiritual. Did Jesus involve himself in all three areas of healing?
- In Christ's time (and today), did many people view illness as merely physical? When Christ healed someone's physical ailments, do you think that healing was limited to the physical?

- Jesus was often followed by people whose intent was to criticize. What was their motive? Are ministers, teachers and doctors immune from this kind of criticism?
- Why do some people seem intent to criticize others regardless of the good works being done?
- Israel’s religious leaders shadowed him with a critical, fault-finding spirit. In what ways did Jesus’ ministry pose a threat to those leaders?
- In what ways can you keep yourself from feeling threatened by anyone whose service to God attracts attention or shows spiritual power?

PRAYER

Giving Jesus, you called fishers and tax collectors to follow you. You’ve called me to follow you, too. Give me a heart that responds to you as those Galileans did. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 5:33-6:16 - New Wine Meets Old Wineskins

Jesus was challenging the status quo, and he used a parable to do so. (The word “parable” occurs 26 times in Luke—5:36 is the first time.) Goatskins often held wine and other fluids in Palestine, but new wine would burst a rigid old skin. Through Jesus, God was establishing new ways of working in the world that would burst old cultural norms. The response to Jesus’ Sabbath healing showed that his message could burst old, rigid spirituality, too.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Using parables, Jesus was introducing new ways of thinking that would burst old cultural norms. Do we have cultural norms today that need to be re-thought?
- Is America a single-culture society? Is your church a single-culture church? How can a mixture of cultures be a positive?
- Has God transformed you from old ways of living to new ways?
- Jesus chose his apostles only after an entire night of prayer. Is prayer important to you when you face significant decisions? Why?

PRAYER

Jesus, it’s easy for me to resist change, even when you ask me to change. Help me resist the temptation to grow rigid in my spiritual journey, but to keep growing in my ability to know, love and serve you. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 6:17-6:49 – The “Sermon on the Plain”

After choosing the Twelve, Jesus laid out his “platform,” to use a modern political analogy. These are the principles of life in his Kingdom/Realm. Luke used much (but not all) of the material from “The Sermon on the Mount” (cf. Matthew 5-7) in this passage. That is not a conflict, however—most scholars believe these ideas were likely the core of most of Jesus’ sermons as he proclaimed “the good news of the Kingdom of God” (Luke 4:43).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- These passages are often considered to be much of the “core” of Christ’s message. For us, in a nice community in the richest country on earth, Jesus’ words can be disturbing. Which parts of his sermon most challenge our culture’s wisdom on how to “succeed”?
- Which of Jesus’ promises in this sermon mean the most to you?
- Who can you think of in history and among Christ’s followers who have stood with the poor and the oppressed?
- Do we do enough to live as Christ has instructed us? How can we train ourselves to follow his teaching more closely?
- How important is it that we do this – and why?

PRAYER

Challenging God, I want to build a life with you that can stand firm no matter how fierce life’s storms become. As you did with St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King, Jr., guide me as I seek to put your words into practice daily. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 7:1-35 – Jesus’ Powerful Acts; John’s Puzzled Question

A Roman commander trusted Jesus implicitly, and Jesus healed his valued servant. Jesus brought a widow’s dead son back to life, and the people of Nain said, “God has come to help his people.” But in prison (Luke 3:20), stalwart John the Baptist began to wonder. When was Jesus going to “clear his threshing floor,” “burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:17)? Was he “the one,” as John had preached? He sent the question to Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Jesus was born a Jew. What evidence do we have that his message of salvation was for Gentiles as well as for Jews?
- Why was Jesus so impressed with the Roman centurion’s attitude?
- Why did Jesus have so much compassion for the widow whose only son had died?
- How did Christ’s response in verses 22-23 point clearly for John to the fact that Jesus was indeed the Messiah?
- When speaking of John the Baptist, what did Jesus mean when he said, “Yet whoever is least in God’s kingdom is greater than he”?
- How can Jesus’ gracious way of dealing with John’s question give you confidence in going to him when you have questions or struggles?

PRAYER

Gracious Jesus, at times I can identify with the faith-filled Roman officer, and at times with your struggling forerunner. Thank you that whether full of faith or filled with questions, I always find in you the loving person who truly was, and is, “the one.” Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 7:36-8:21 – Finding Fertile Soil for Faith

A religious leader invited Jesus to eat at his house, but he seems to have treated Jesus quite rudely (Luke 7:44-46). A “woman from the city, a sinner” found Jesus there, and poured out her love in tears and perfume. Jesus told a story that taught that he sowed the seed of God’s love and grace everywhere. Human eyes can’t always tell where it will find fertile ground in which to grow, and where it will land on rocky ground that causes it to wither away.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Among the four kinds of “soil” Jesus described, which kind best characterized the Pharisee? Which characterized the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet?
- Which of the four soil types has best described your spiritual journey so far?
- What spiritual practices can help you continue growing your capacity to be “good soil” in the months ahead?
- Was Jesus also teaching that he sowed his seeds of love and grace everywhere in the world? What does this mean to you?

PRAYER

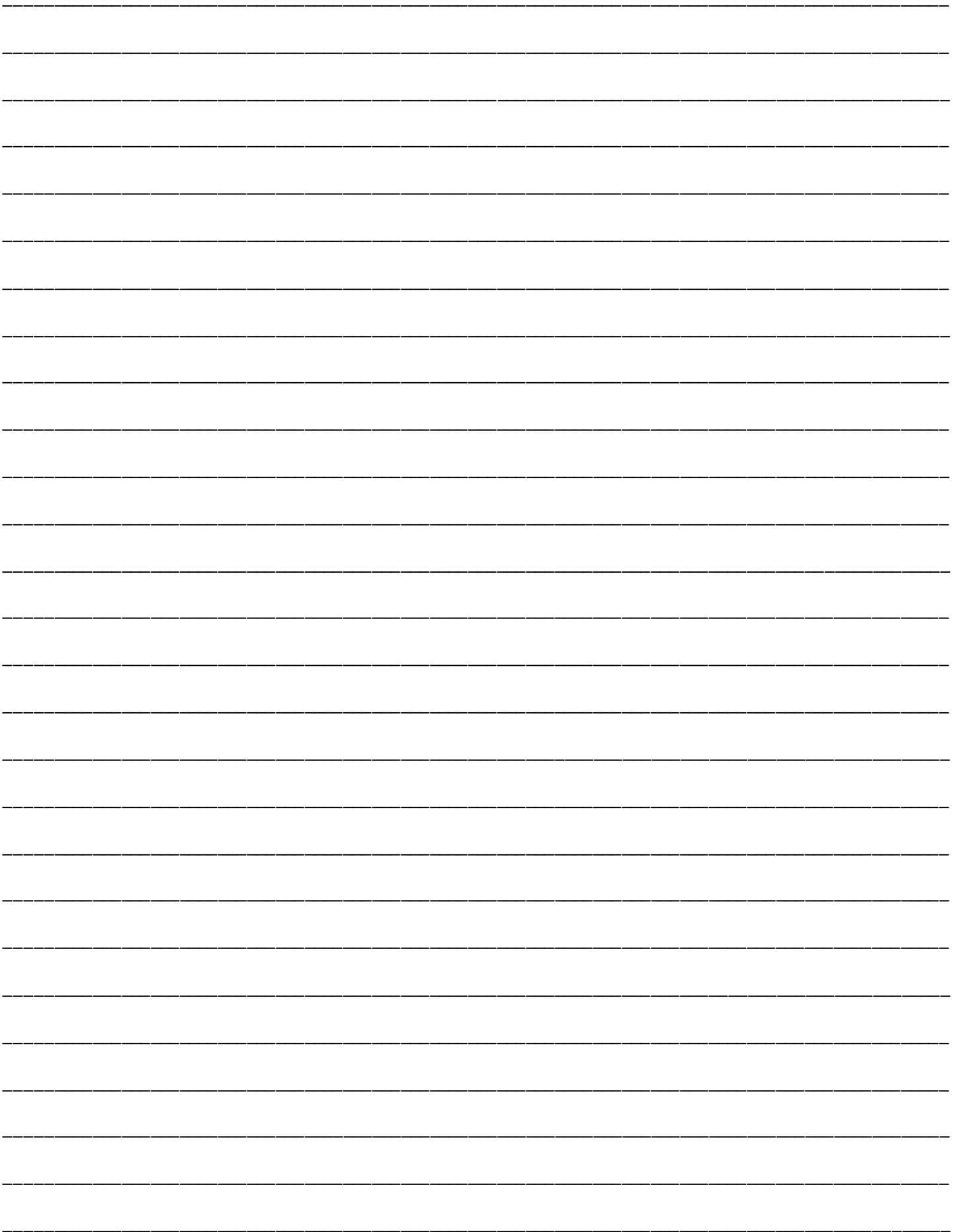
God, please grow a bountiful crop of your love, your purity, your goodness and compassion in the soil of my heart. Let me be full to bursting with the fruit of your Spirit. Amen.

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you prayerfully consider the many people who do thankless but essential work for our benefit? Did you make a special effort to extend your thanks and kindness to all of those who do this work and who may seldom receive any recognition? Remember to journal your experiences and/or share with your group.

IN THE COMING WEEK

Prayerfully consider all the defenseless, sick and differently-abled people of the world. Offer prayers for them to find relief and healing. Pray also for their emotional and spiritual peace. If possible, try to visit any of these people who you personally know. Journal your experiences and/or plan to share them with your group next week.



The Demon-Possessed

March 21 - 26, 2022

NOTE: Using different Bible translations may be helpful for these readings. For groups, reading aloud from the Common English Bible or The Message may help to clarify the meaning of some passages.

MONDAY Luke 8:22-56 – **The Power to Calm All Storms**

The Sea of Galilee sat in a kind of geologic “bowl,” and was always subject to sudden, severe storms. Jesus calmed one of them and amazed his disciples. Yet he showed a different, even greater kind of power as he calmed the inner storms of an unstable man, healed a woman ailing for 12 years, and gave life and hope back to a synagogue leader and his deathly ill child..

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- As you read these stories about some of Jesus' miracles, what do you learn about Jesus' character and priorities?
- What do you think about the miracle of Jesus calming the storm and the water?
- Archaeologists found a boat from Jesus' time in mud at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee (To learn more, visit www.jesusboat.com/boat.php). Such a small boat, with only a sail or oars for power, must have seemed terribly inadequate to deal with a violent storm. What “storms” are you facing for which your human resources seem inadequate? How can you open yourself to Jesus' power and love, letting him help bring you peace as you face those storms?
- Whether surrounded by storms, criticism, or crowds of people, Jesus maintained his calm self-possession. What enabled Jesus to resist fear in situations that triggered it in most people? Do you believe his quiet confidence created a more supportive, safe environment for others to change their lives for the better?
- What can be done to ensure that the calming power of Jesus enters our lives? Can Jesus' confidence and calm be instilled in us?

PRAYER

Amazing God, what I want, almost always, is for your power to quiet the storms outside of me. Give me a deeper appreciation of the love and power with which you often quiet the storm inside me instead. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 9:1-27– **The King Who Came to Give**

Jesus sent the 12 out for what we might almost see as “serving practice.” He then had them help him feed 5,000 people. In answer to Jesus' searching question, Peter said Jesus was the Christ (Greek for *anointed one*—equivalent to the Hebrew *Messiah*). Jesus did not dispute the identification—but he did say frankly that being the Christ meant suffering, not earthly power. And it meant that, not just for him, but for those who chose to follow him, too.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- These verses showed Jesus' power flowing through others, rather than directly meeting people's needs. Does he still call us to be vehicles through whom his power flows?
- How did the story show our need to rely on Jesus' power, not our own, to achieve God's purposes?
- How do you understand Jesus' question, "What advantage do people have if they gain the whole world for themselves yet perish or lose their lives?" How have you had to face that question in your own life?
- What choice(s) do you face that promise gain, yet might cost you your values, self-respect, or honor? In what ways can you gain the strength and self-knowledge to make the right choices?

PRAYER

Jesus, today I pray simply this: give me a heart that's always oriented to your ways, even when under pressure. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 9:28-50- What Does True Greatness Look Like?

Moses, Elijah, a flash of light, God's voice—THAT looked like greatness to human eyes. For Peter, John, and James, seeing the greatness and glory of Jesus was so overwhelming it left them speechless. But true greatness in God's kingdom wasn't on a mountaintop. When they came down from that experience, Jesus defined greatness as having childlike trust in God, healing the sick and broken, serving people's needs, and even suffering at human hands.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- God told Peter, James, and John to listen to the son, Jesus. What does it mean for you to listen to Jesus? Are you willing to do that? What can make that difficult to do?
- How do you define greatness?
- How did Jesus define greatness?
- In what specific ways do greatness according to God and greatness according to the world differ?

PRAYER

Holy Jesus, thank you for showing me what true greatness looks like. Help me to seek a greatness based on your example of faith, serving, and even the willingness to suffer for the sake of others. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 9:51-10:24– “He Determined to Go to Jerusalem”

From Luke 9:51 on, Jesus was purposefully going to Jerusalem. (He arrived there in Luke 19:28, on Palm Sunday.) Like the gospel of John, Luke wanted it to be clear that Jesus was not a victim who stumbled unknowingly into hostile Jerusalem (cf. John 10:17-18). Luke framed every event from 9:51 on in this light: Jesus was going to Jerusalem, where the cross awaited. Yet this was a march to victory, not defeat.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Why was Jesus so determined to go to Jerusalem? What mission did he have to fulfill there?
- Verses 59-62 speak to the issues of our priorities and loyalties. Do you find this section troubling?
- Have you ever ranked your priorities and loyalties for your life? This is significant in any “life planning” process. How do things like job, family, country, friends, school, or anything else rank in your life? Where does God come in?
- The disciples were elated because of the power Jesus had given them. In verse 10:20, how did he turn their eyes to the true basis for Christian joy and confidence, regardless of outward appearances?
- How should we feel about the gifts we’ve been given in Christ’s service?

PRAYER

Jesus, you knew where you were going, and you knew why. Give me an inner compass that discerns the key directions and movements of the course you are calling me to follow with my life. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 10:25-11:13– Parables, Priorities and Prayer

Part of what it meant for Jesus to “determine to go to Jerusalem” was the growing presence of legal experts and Pharisees testing him with questions that sought to trap him. He answered this one with a story showing in vivid human terms what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. He told his friend Martha it was vital to make him her first priority, and he taught his disciples how to pray—and why.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- The Samaritan in the story didn’t just offer casual roadside help. He put the injured man on “his own donkey” (meaning he walked), brought him to an inn, cared for him, paid two days’ wages, and offered to pay more on his return if needed. How does the story of the Samaritan tell us of God’s goodness toward us?
- How can knowing we’ve received God’s generosity move us to be generous to our neighbors in ways we never would achieve out of our own goodness?
- Re-read 11:9-10. Does Jesus guarantee that we will receive whatever we ask for? What do you understand the verses to mean?
- What things are you praying for today? If God answers by giving you the Holy Spirit’s presence, will you thank God for that or be upset that you didn’t receive the other thing you asked for?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, give me the bread I need for today. Help me recognize your presence in my life that may be revealed in unexpected ways. Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 11:14-54– Confronting the Self-Righteous

People who believed themselves to be upright slandered Jesus—for setting people free from conditions caused by evil! Yet they fixated on washing for ritual purity (not for hygiene—remember, no one knew about germs in their day). Jesus strongly disputed their sense that outward rituals matter more than inner sincerity and openness. He was kind, but not a doormat, and he bluntly challenged their claims to have a corner on righteousness.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Sometimes our efforts to “clean up our life” don’t work out, Jesus said in verses 24-26. It doesn’t help much just to clear out the bad, to give up hurtful habits. What are some positive ways you have learned to allow God to fill your soul with divine purpose and love?
- Many of the people in these verses were “spiritually blind.” How would you define spiritual blindness?
- In what ways has God brought new light to your mind, to your ways of thinking, over the last couple of years?
- How guilty are we of condemning the acts of others without considering our own faults? How do you feel when historians expose flaws in otherwise good heroes of the past like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., etc.? Do you feel let down by their flaws, maintain your admiration for their goodness, or both?
- Have you ever wondered what historians who studied your life would report?

PRAYER

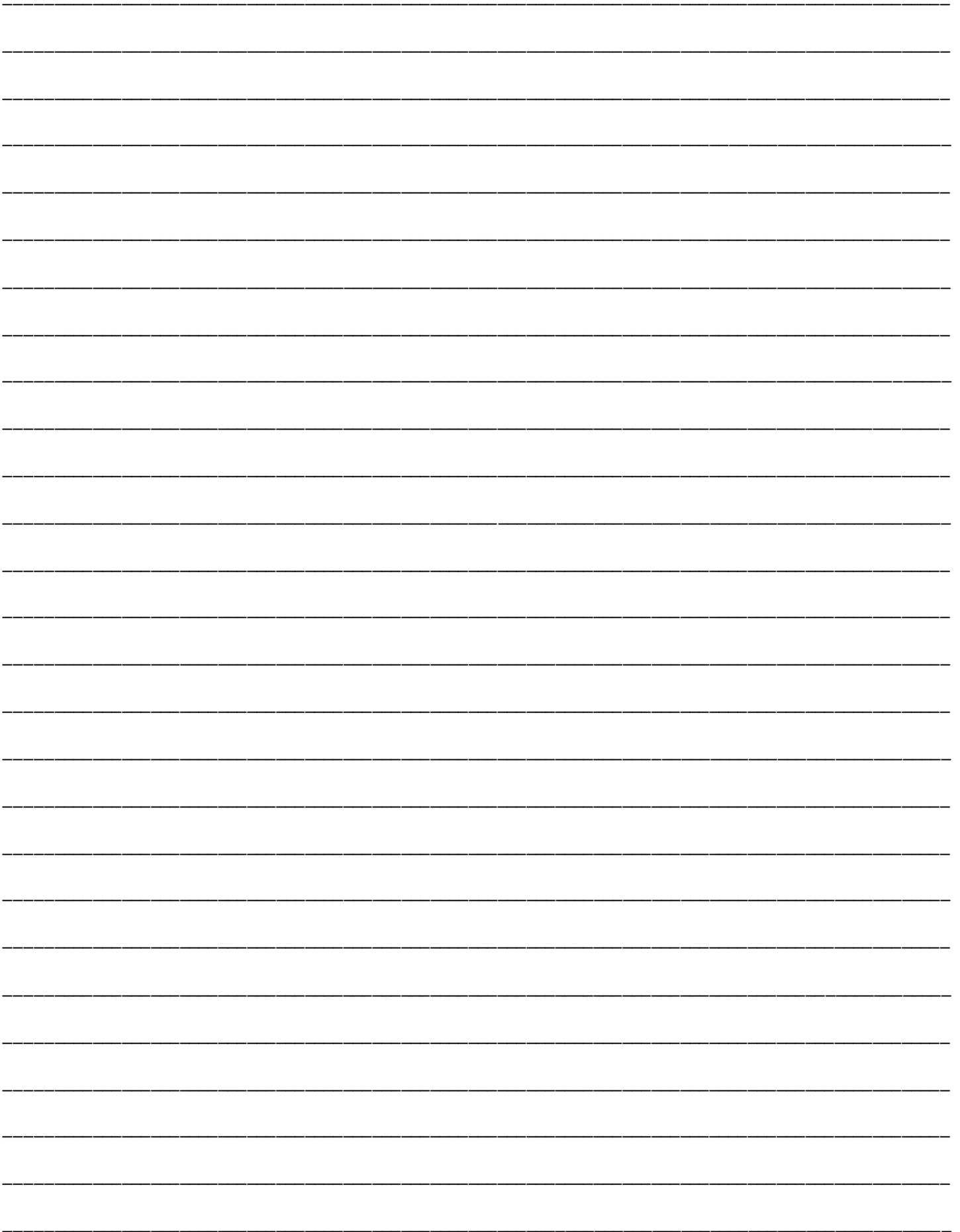
God, open the eyes of my heart. Let me soak in the light of your love and grace, so that it may beam out of me to lighten the lives of all who come in contact with me. Amen.

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you prayerfully consider all the helpless, sick and disabled people of the world? Did you offer prayers for them to find relief and healing? Did you pray also for their emotional and spiritual peace? Did you try to visit any of these people who you personally know? Remember to journal your experiences and/or share with your group.

IN THE COMING WEEK

Prayerfully consider how to overcome any self-righteousness in your own life. Become conscious of those times when you might otherwise react self-righteously toward others and work to change your attitude and your actions. Journal your experiences and/or plan to share them with your group next week.



Prostitutes and Prodigals

March 28 – April 2, 2022

NOTE: Using different Bible translations may be helpful for these readings. For groups, reading aloud from the Common English Bible or The Message may help to clarify the meaning of some passages.

MONDAY Luke 12:1-34 – **From the Inside Out**

From the start of his ministry, Jesus' message challenged his day's religious and political leadership structures. He taught that faith and trust must flow from the inside out, and gave a wide-ranging set of warnings against a "mismatch between... hearts and lives." Live authentic lives devoted to God, he told his followers. "Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Is God okay with a half-hearted faith? Why or why not?
- How wholehearted is your faith? What does it look like in your life today to follow Jesus wholeheartedly and passionately?
- Describe a life that pleases God. Do you think God cares about each of us in as detailed a way as Jesus described?
- Jesus repeatedly said not to worry about anything. Really? Does he appreciate the pressures and demands of our everyday lives? If he does, how does he expect us not to worry about financial matters, our health, family troubles, etc.?
- What kinds of things do most people tend to treasure? How is the Christian's "treasure" supposed to be different?
- How does Jesus' teaching challenge the ways you think and act about how much security and satisfaction "stuff" can bring you?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for offering me eternal security and everlasting fulfillment. It's hard for me to make the inside of me match the outside sometimes. Help me desire your kingdom above all else. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 12:35-13:9 – **We Are Responsible for Serving Wisely and Well**

At the start of this passage, Jesus compared his followers to servants. Good ones are ready to respond to their master's commands and wishes at all times; bad ones get fired (or in Roman times, even worse). Jesus was not endorsing those cruel practices but was making the point that choosing to serve God is a matter of eternal life or death. The section ended with a haunting parable—Jesus didn't seem to give it an ending.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Jesus said his followers are servants. In what ways are Christians servants?
- How can we know when we are serving God and when we are not? Do the quality and quantity of our deeds adequately measure our godly service?
- Jesus is “the Prince of Peace” and yet he said he brought division among people. What did he mean? Have family members, friends, or co-workers ever misunderstood or criticized choices you’ve made based on your loyalty to God?
- The last parable in this reading is unfinished: Jesus never said whether the tree did or didn’t bear fruit. So what about you--how will you finish Jesus’ unfinished parable in your life?

PRAYER

Nurturing Jesus, you dig up the soil around me, water and fertilize, and watch eagerly for the fruit to appear in me. Help me to work with you, so that my life may indeed bear fruit to your glory. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 13:10-13:35- Healing, and Hearts That Refuse It

Jesus ended 18 years of disability for one woman “at once.” But since he did it on the Sabbath, that upset the synagogue leader. To him, her case was no crisis—she’d suffered for 18 years. But for Jesus, that made healing, now, even more vital (verse 16). Still making his way to Jerusalem (verse 22), he mourned over a spirit that loved rules above people. One commentary called verses 31-35 “Lament of the Rejected Lover.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- The religious leaders were constantly emphasizing their rules and regulations, rather than what Jesus said really mattered. How can Christians let abstract religious questions distract them from focusing on what matters most to God?
- What spiritual practices help you stay focused on what is most important to God?
- Why do some people seem to put off establishing a faithful relationship with God? What did Jesus say about that?
- Verses 33-35 were the first of four laments Jesus spoke for Jerusalem in Luke. What do Jesus’ sorrowful words about the fate of the city that was rejecting him tell you about his heart? How do you react when trouble comes to a person or group that you might consider an enemy?

PRAYER

Caring Jesus, you said you wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem “as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” That is what I desire. Shelter and nurture my life in you, that I may grow strong in your grace. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 14:1-35 – God’s Great (and Costly) Banquet

The watching Pharisees surely weren’t shocked when Jesus again ignored their Sabbath healing rules. But Jesus shocked them in a different way. They loved to talk about the end-time feast for God’s people (verse 15). But in Jesus’ feast story, the chosen said “no,” and God called street people instead! Making him your Lord, Jesus said, is costly. Count the cost before you set out on the Journey.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- In verse 11, Jesus said, “All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.” How do you interpret this verse?
- What did Jesus mean when he said the chosen guests wouldn’t be allowed to attend the banquet, but others would?
- What does Jesus’ picture of inviting people from “the city’s streets, the busy ones and the side streets,” “the highways and back alleys,” tell you about the wideness of God’s mercy, and about the church Jesus was creating?
- In *The Message*, verse 14:26 reads, “Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one’s own self! —can’t be my disciple.” What does this mean to you?
- It can be a challenging spiritual exercise to ask in prayer, “Lord, are there any things, people or dreams I love more than you?” If you do this, make sure you’re willing to shift priorities to honor any insights you get.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, of course I want to be one of the guests at your great end-time feast. Give me a heart that will continue to rejoice in being there even if some of the other guests might initially surprise me or even make me uncomfortable. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 15:1-32– “This Man Welcomes Sinners”—and Celebrates It!

It was a familiar charge: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” With sinners and tax collectors gathering around to listen to him, Jesus could hardly deny it—and he didn’t want to. He embraced the “charge” with three vivid stories in which finding a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost boy set off big celebrations. To the last story, he pointedly added an older son who didn’t want to welcome the lost boy home.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- A basic, but crucial question: Why did Jesus welcome sinners?
- The Pharisees labeled people “good” or “bad,” and saw “bad people” as unlikely to change. Jesus saw people much more as “lost” (like the sheep, coin, or boy), and believed what’s lost can be found. When have you lost your way spiritually and needed finding?
- Jesus pictured God rejoicing each time a heart responds to God’s love. Whose model has most helped you see God as more eager to find a lost person than to punish a bad person?

- In the story of the prodigal son, who does the older son represent? How has some part of your life been like that of the prodigal son? What brought you “home?”
- How do you think the older son’s story might have ended? If you’ve been at the party of faith for a while, how do you respond to God’s appeal to welcome home the lost who are found?

PRAYER

Gracious Jesus, you always made friends with outsiders, but you were always seeking to draw them to higher ground. Give me the heart and the wisdom to live out both parts of your example. Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 16:1-31– Shrewd Swindler, Foolish Rich Man

Jesus told of a swindler whose boss applauded him for his shrewdness in buying off “friends” to watch after him when he’d lost his job. He wasn’t endorsing financial fraud, but asking: if even a swindler can look down the road, wouldn’t you be wiser to use wealth for eternal purposes than for short-term earthly gain? Then Luke shared another “status inversion” story. A rich man ignored a poor beggar at his very gates. But the beggar got to enjoy heaven, while the rich man begged him to warn his brothers away from his hellish fate.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- In what ways can each of us be, in God’s eyes, “faithful with money?” How can we be sure that we are placing God above our concerns over money?
- What does the phrase “selling out” mean to you?
- What message did you receive in reading the story of the rich man and Lazarus?
- How much time have you spent in the Old Testament, reading messages from Moses and the prophets? Phillip Yancey called the Hebrew Scriptures “the Bible Jesus read,” and they are important, of course, to fully understanding the New Testament. Do you agree with Jesus that the Hebrew Scriptures could have taught the rich man, and his brothers, what they needed to know to live justly and compassionately?
- What influences have helped you to build your values (social, financial, and spiritual) on the teachings of Moses and the prophets—and Jesus?

PRAYER

God, deliver me from all of the other masters that try to lure me to make them supreme in my heart. I surrender my life to your gracious and loving realm forever. Amen.

FROM LAST WEEK

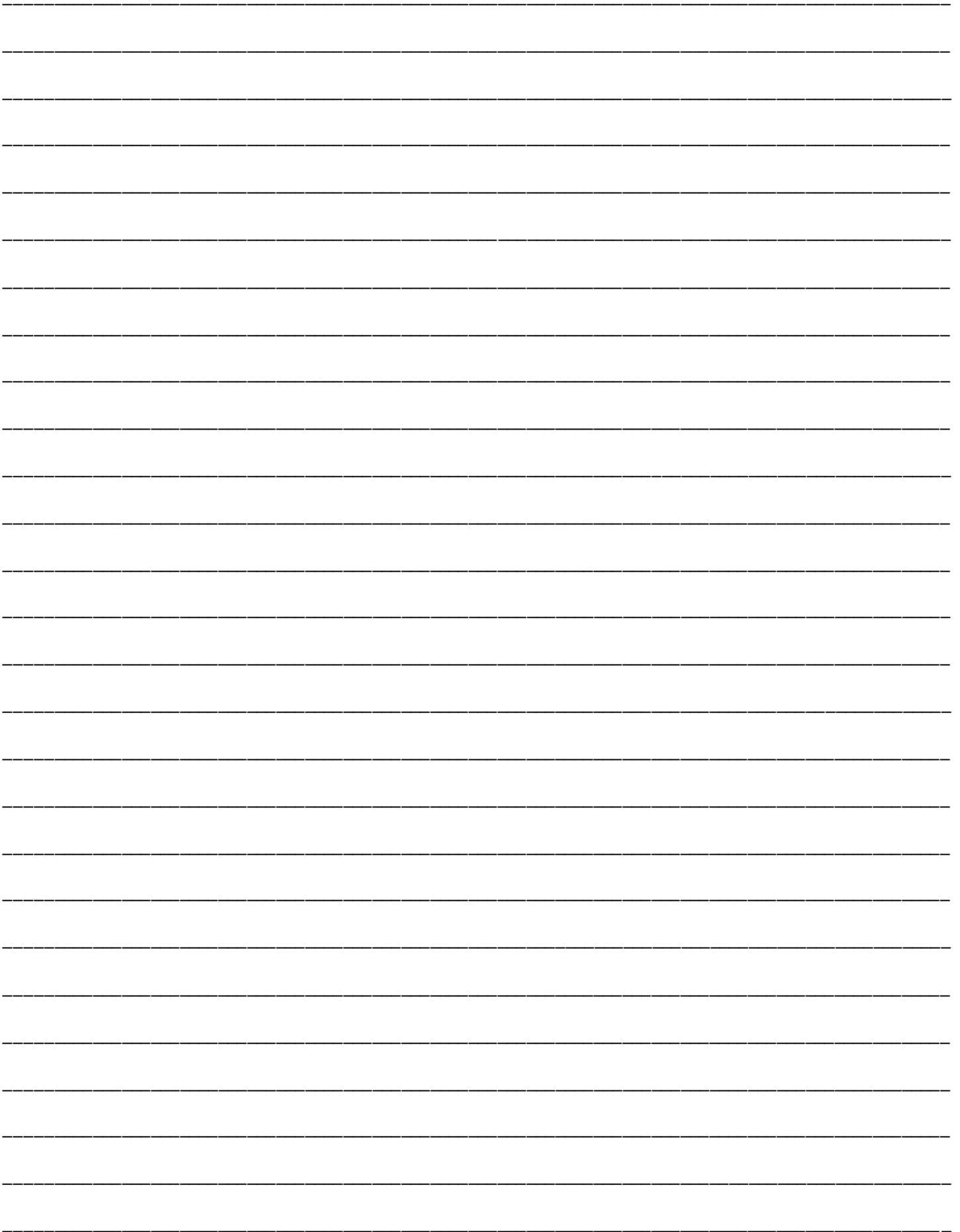
Did you prayerfully consider how to overcome any self-righteousness in your own life? Did you become conscious of those times when you might otherwise react self-righteously toward others and work to change your attitude and your actions? Remember to journal your experiences and/or share with your group.

IN THE COMING WEEK

Prayerfully consider whether you are being a faithful steward of God's gifts of faith. Consider these questions:

- Do you possess the right values?
- Do you care for the interests of others?
- Do you live with integrity?
- Do you keep your promises?
- Do you develop your God-given gifts?
- Do you obey God's commands?
- Do you share what you learn?

Journal your experiences and/or plan to share them with your group next week.



The Homeless Beggars

April 4 - 9, 2022

NOTE: Using different Bible translations may be helpful for these readings. For groups, reading aloud from the Common English Bible or The Message may help to clarify the meaning of some passages.

MONDAY Luke 17:1-37 – **The Kingdom of Forgiveness and Gratitude**

Jesus amazed his disciples, saying they should forgive “Even if someone sins against you seven times in one day” (We more often hear the “seventy times seven” version from Matthew 18). “Increase our faith!” the disciples said. But Jesus said faith isn’t a matter of quantity. He healed ten lepers who showed just a little faith. Only one, a Samaritan, bothered to say “thank you.” When Pharisees asked at what point in the future God’s Kingdom would come, Jesus’ answer focused mainly on the need for his hearers to recognize and trust God daily.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Why didn’t the nine lepers thank Jesus? What were they thinking? What does this say about humankind and our relationship to God?
- How much do Christians take for granted? What kinds of things do we take for granted?
- Are we proud of ourselves for things when we should be thanking God?
- Are there any experiences or obstacles that make it harder for you to have a more grateful spirit? Are there things you have forgotten or neglected to thank and praise God for?
- Luke used the Greek words *entōs humōn*, which could mean either that God’s kingdom is “among you” or “within you” (or, perhaps, both). What does this comment by Jesus mean to you?

PRAYER

Jesus, sometimes I, too, want to ask, “When is your kingdom coming?” This day, help me to worry less about the future, and to recognize your kingdom’s presence among us, and within me. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 18:1-30 – **When Outsiders Make It In**

Jesus contrasted God with an unjust human judge. The real issue, he said, was not if we can trust God, but if God can trust us: “Will the Human One (or, Son of Man) find faithfulness on earth?” Jesus’ culture devalued tax collectors and children. Jesus said those “nobodies” were more likely to receive God’s favor than a self-satisfied Pharisee or a ruler who loved things more than God. “Who then can be saved?” his startled hearers asked. Jesus replied, “What is impossible for humans is possible for God.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Jesus told his disciples that they should “always pray and not give up.” What does this mean to you and how might it affect your prayer life?
- In 18:1-8 Jesus asked, “If even an unjust judge will do justice if pressed hard enough, how much more can we trust God to do justice?” Then he asked if he will find faithfulness on earth. In other words, can we keep trusting God to do justice even in the face of disappointments or delays? How is your heart answering Jesus’ question about faith?
- What is the message of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector?
- In verse 17, Jesus warns that anyone not receiving God’s kingdom like a little child “will never enter it.” What does this mean?
- Do we own our possessions or do our possessions tend to own us?
- Most people in Jesus’ day thought material riches ALWAYS meant God’s favor. When the wealthy young ruler whose possessions “owned” him turned away, Jesus said that it was very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom. His hearers, reflecting their belief, replied, “Then who can be saved?” Are you confident that, whether you are a somebody or a nobody, your salvation is “possible for God”? What difference does that make in how you live each day?

PRAYER

God of Discernment, help me to give up trusting in my own righteousness. Teach me to pray without giving up and not be owned by my material possessions. Be the center and source of my life, now and forever. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 18:31-19:10 - The Blind (Physically and Spiritually) See

“We are going up to Jerusalem,” Jesus said again at the start of this passage—and he was nearly there. These stories happened in Jericho, near Jerusalem at the north end of the Dead Sea. The disciples still failed to understand Jesus, but at Jesus’ touch a physically blind man and a spiritually blind tax collector both began to see.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- What is the significance of Jesus restoring the sight of the blind man?
- Why did Jesus ask, “What do you want me to do for you?” when that must have been obvious?
- Is Jesus asking the same question of us every day? Why does he ask if he already knows our needs? Do we tend to answer from a worldly or spiritual point of view?
- Imagine Jesus asking you “What do you want me to do for you?” What need(s) do you sense most clearly?
- Luke 18:34 said after three years the disciples still didn’t “get” the meaning of Jesus’ words about dying and rising. Yet 19:8 suggested that in one day Zacchaeus’ values and actions changed radically. Has God ever changed any part of your life quickly or dramatically? In what areas are you patiently struggling to grow, even with God’s help?

PRAYER

Loving Lord, the grit and dust of this world too often blinds me to your presence and the values of your realm. Please restore my inner vision, that I may see you and your purposes in my life more clearly. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 19:11-28 – Playing It Safe Doesn't Work

Jesus used a bold story about a king and his servants to teach a lesson about faithful service. This story (told a bit differently in Matthew 25) praised the servants who went all out to serve their master—the master even rewarded them with more responsibilities. This story also cautioned against playing it too safe, as it told of the king rebuking the “worthless servant” who was too afraid to risk anything.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- In what ways are we called to “risk” something as followers of Jesus Christ?
- How do our God-given gifts point to the tasks God has given us? How are we tempted to hide or bury our gifts, rather than use them?
- Jesus, our example, didn't play it safe, even though he knew what was going to happen in Jerusalem. What does it look like if you play it safe with your faith? What does it look like to trust God and take risks?
- Where might God be calling you to take a risk for God's sake today?

PRAYER

Jesus, I want to serve you faithfully. Help me to see in what ways you have gifted me and help me to use those gifts to serve you boldly and faithfully. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 19:29-20:19 – Triumphantly Entering a Heartbreaking City

The long journey that began in Luke 9:51 ended, and Jesus entered Jerusalem. He very deliberately entered in a way that echoed history (cf. 1 Kings 1:32-39) and prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-10) and made a clear claim to peaceful kingship. But he wept over the city, tears that tell us he loved the city's people. Yet their heedless leaders did not love him. As they plotted his death, Jesus told a story that exposed the murder in their hearts.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- The prophet Zechariah wrote that a righteous king would ride on a donkey's colt, and bring Jerusalem salvation and peace. How did Luke hint that Jesus pre-arranged his ride into Jerusalem to fulfill that prophecy?
- Who sang and praised Jesus (verses 37-39)? Who found his entrance into the holy city offensive?

- Would you more likely have been with “the establishment” who didn’t want the orderly status quo disrupted, or with the upstart rabbi from Galilee?
- Why did Jesus weep for Jerusalem?
- Why did the priests and teachers want to kill Jesus?
- How would we feel and react if today some preacher other than our own were to walk into our church and begin preaching?
- Jesus’ vineyard story drew on a beloved Scripture (Isaiah 5:1-7), which called Israel God’s vineyard. But Luke 19:47 and 20:19 show the hatred that surrounded Jesus during his last week. We, like the Jerusalem leaders, can have blind spots. Is there anything God’s spirit is nudging you to face honestly in your life? Do you have the courage to face it, to know “the things that lead to peace?”

PRAYER

Courageous Jesus, when you were born, there wasn’t room for you. When you came to Jerusalem, they still didn’t have room for you. Today I open my heart—I want to make room for you in my life always. Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 20:20-21:4 – Expertly Laid Traps and Humble Devotion

Jesus’ enemies, all of them “somebodies,” tried urgently to create a cause for his death. They tried to get him to criticize paying Roman taxes or to agree with them that faith in a resurrection was absurd. But neither their trick questions nor their great outward show of piety fooled Jesus. For him, greatness lay not in earthly rank, but in people like the humble widow, whose tiny gift only he noticed.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Jesus described pious frauds in verses 46-47: “In long robes ... love being greeted with honor ... places of honor ... cheat widows out of their homes ... to show off they say long prayers.” Why do people like that often achieve prominence, often even if many people see through them?
- How can we avoid being like those Jesus spoke of in verses 46-47? How should we, as believers, see ourselves in our heart of hearts?
- Why was it so important for Jesus to assure us that death was not the end, neither for him nor for us? Do you share his confidence in this assurance? How can this belief change our day-to-day lives?

PRAYER

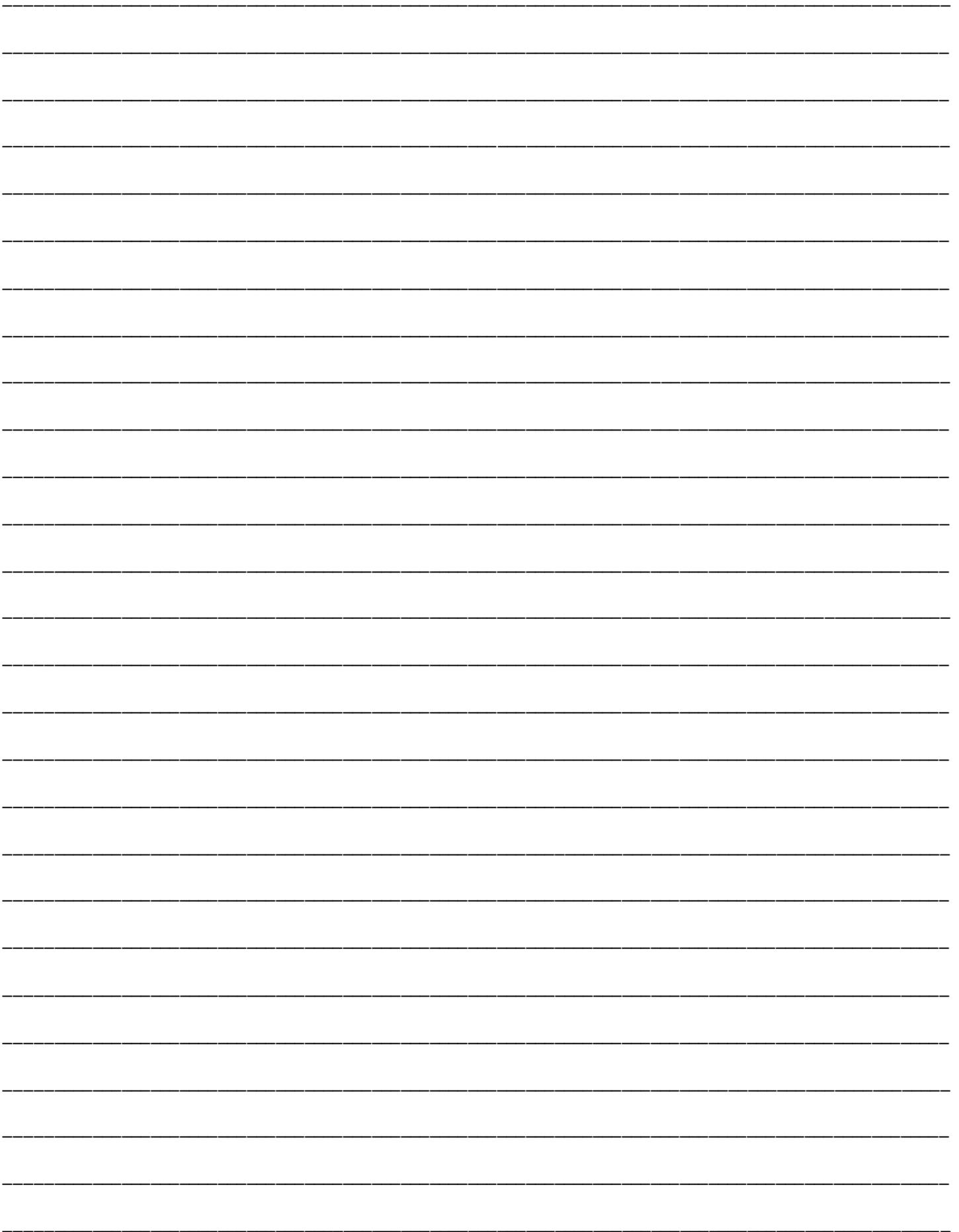
Jesus, you were not a naïve, mild presence. Your piercing insight made some people very uncomfortable. But your purpose was always to include and to value God’s children. Give me a measure of your insight, and a large dose of your redemptive heart. Amen.

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you prayerfully consider whether you are being a faithful steward of God's gifts of faith? Did you review the seven items listed last week and try to make any adjustments you thought were needed? Remember to journal your experiences and/or share with your group.

IN THE COMING WEEK

Consider the health of your own prayer life. Find ways throughout your daily life to incorporate your interaction with God by thinking of God often. Be sure to share your needs with God, never tiring of involving God in your day-to-day activities. Journal your experiences and/or plan to share them with your group next week. (was this rewarding or an interruption?)



The Thief on the Cross

April 11 - 16, 2022

NOTE: Using different Bible translations may be helpful for these readings. For groups, reading aloud from the Common English Bible or The Message may help to clarify the meaning of some passages.

MONDAY Luke 21:5-38— **Faith in the Face of Catastrophe**

Jesus had bad news—the Temple, the place where Jews met with God, would be destroyed. Still more, great hardship and persecution would follow the Temple’s destruction. Jesus’ shocking words about the Jerusalem Temple came true in 70 A.D. Despite the dire facts of this life, Jesus urged his listeners to keep faith through the hardship. His central message was, “Don’t be alarmed ... raise your heads, because your redemption is near.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Jesus warned his listeners that very hard times were coming, but told them to keep their faith. Think about hard times you have faced. Did your faith help you to get through them?
- What makes it hard to keep your faith in the midst of hardships?
- What kinds of things tend to test your faith on a day-to-day basis?
- Are there people in your life who have been a model of living with patient faith? Can you do the same for others?
- The life of faith is not always easy. Scholar N. T. Wright put it this way: “This is what it’s about: not an exciting battle, with adrenaline flowing and banners flying, but the steady tread, of prayer and hope and scripture and sacrament and witness, day by day and week by week.” How does this quote strike you?

PRAYER

Jesus, I trust you even when life gets difficult. Give me the strength and patience I need to deal with life’s struggles, the ones I am facing now and those that will come in the future. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 22:1-30 – **Jesus Re-imagined the Passover**

The annual Passover meal (part of the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread) reminded the Jewish people of God’s great act of rescuing their ancestors from Egypt (cf. Exodus 12:1-18). It was their defining story. When Jesus and his disciples shared the Passover meal, with the cross just ahead, Jesus added meaning to the meal. He said that, from then on, the bread and wine would point to his even greater act of deliverance in dying and rising again.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Do you believe betrayal and plotting against Jesus still occurs in the world?
- How do we, as Christ’s followers, ensure that we don’t betray his vision for humankind, even in small ways?

- With these Passover events, Jesus introduced the practice of Holy Communion. How does taking part in Communion reinforce your faith?
- Do you trust that God’s promises are not just empty “church talk,” but offer a future you can count on?
- How can we intentionally prepare our hearts to get the most out of Easter?

PRAYER

Living Christ, I rejoice in your saving acts in the past. But even more, I look forward with such eagerness to the day when you fully establish your kingdom. Keep me faithfully on track until that day. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 22:31-62 - The Storm Broke—and Peter Failed

“Lord,” Peter said, “I’m ready to go with you, both to prison and to death!” Ancient Christian tradition said Peter was crucified in Rome around 64 A.D., but when he spoke these words, he wasn’t, in fact, “ready” for that. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. Jesus was arrested, and when bystanders said he must have been with Jesus, Peter denied it three times. Then a rooster crowed, and Peter “went out and cried uncontrollably.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Peter had exhibited that he was no coward; he was a human being under pressure. Has pressure ever led you to be ashamed of and to hide your allegiance to Jesus?
- Was there anything Peter might have done that would have helped him to avoid disavowing Jesus?
- In what ways can prayer help us to overcome temptations?
- All four gospels tell of Peter’s shattering failure. Yet when they were written, Peter was known as a great apostle and prominent church leader. It seems likely that he himself told the story – that he had openly shared his failure, and the forgiveness and hope he’d found in its wake. When have you grown through a failure that you were able to embrace and learn from by God’s grace?

PRAYER

Holy One, like Peter, I keep learning things about myself, finding a need to grow in areas I thought I had down cold. Thank you for your ongoing grace, for nudging me to grow even when I’m comfortable. Amen.

THURSDAY (Maundy Thursday) Luke 22:63-23:12

They “tried” Jesus—and condemned themselves

Throughout most of his public ministry, Jesus’ enemies had dogged his footsteps, claiming that he was a false teacher, perhaps even demonic (cf. Luke 11:14-16). But when they had him in their power, the contrast was striking. Jesus remained calm and in control of himself. The leaders, who claimed great “righteousness,” were frenzied, unfair, and cruel, showing a spirit tragically filled with hatred and evil.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- In comparison to criminal proceedings of today, in what ways was the “trial” of Jesus unfair?
- How would you describe Christ’s demeanor while he was being beaten and berated? How would you describe the demeanor of the “righteous” people who were Jesus’ accusers?
- Has anyone ever treated you unfairly? In what ways can you grow toward having the spirit with which Jesus endured this mockery of a trial?
- How can we strengthen our ability to remain calm and in control of ourselves when we face the adversities of life and faith?
- Why could it be said that it wasn’t Jesus who was on trial, but rather the people who accused him?

PRAYER

Jesus, in reflecting on your unfair trial, I confess that fear or prejudice can often blind me. Forgive me, cleanse me, and give me a clearer vision of how my actions can heal or harm. Amen.

FRIDAY (Good Friday) Luke 23:13-46 – “They crucified him, along with the criminals”

Three times (verse 22) Pilate asked Jesus’ accusers why they were so insistent on his death. He got no coherent answers, yet “their voices won out” (verse 23). Jesus was nailed to a cross by a public road. He asked God to forgive his executioners, promised a crucified thief eternal life, and prayed Psalm 31:5 as he died. On that bad Friday, Jesus absorbed and transformed human evil into God’s central saving act, and turned the day into “Good Friday.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Why did Pilate, a powerful man, bow to the pressure of the people, knowing it wasn’t right?
- Why do we call the day Christ was crucified and died “Good Friday?”
- Have you ever had to choose whether to do the right thing if, by doing so, others would be very upset with you? In these circumstances, how do we choose what to do?
- What do you think about the criminal’s last-minute appeal to Jesus?
- What is the significance of the temple curtain being torn in two?
- We know many Jewish mothers used Psalm 31:5 (“into your hand I entrust my life”) as a children’s bedtime prayer. Jesus may well have learned the verse from Mary as a little boy, and repeated it on the cross. Are you able to entrust your life fully into God’s hand?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your example of trust, at a moment of pain and death, shows me again that in your kingdom “the worst thing is never the last thing.” Into your hand I entrust my life. Amen.

SATURDAY Luke 23:47-56 – “They saw the tomb”

Luke reported two unexpected acts after Jesus died. The Roman centurion, after directing the crucifixion, praised God and affirmed Jesus’ righteousness. That testimony might have been especially telling to a person like Theophilus (cf. Luke 1:1-4). The Romans meant crucifixion to create humiliation and fear, so they often left crucified corpses in the open. Belatedly, Joseph of Arimathea, a council member and silent dissenter at Jesus’ mock trial, went public to give the body a decent burial. No one expected the resurrection, but Joseph’s act unwittingly made Easter more powerful, because Jesus’ friends knew just where his body was.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- What was Luke trying to tell us by listing all the people who witnessed Christ’s crucifixion and death?
- When Romans usually left bodies on display on the crosses, why would Pilate have allowed Joseph to remove the body for burial?
- Why did Luke make sure to tell us that people witnessed Christ’s body being put into the tomb?

Scholar N. T. Wright sums up today’s passage:

It really happened. It wasn’t a mistake. We didn’t get it wrong. It’s true. You can rely on it. This is the main point of Luke’s account of Jesus’ death and burial. He began his book telling Theophilus he could rely on these facts, and now that the most vital one is before us he presents his witnesses one by one. The centurion saw ... The crowds standing by saw ... Jesus’ followers, not least the women, stood at some distance, but they too saw ... Then the burial: again, the women saw what happened ... Evidence. Eyewitnesses. This is what Luke promised, and this is what he’s now giving us.

Every witness, every fact was vital. On Easter, an incredible, one-of-a-kind event was coming. Ponder how different Jesus’ impact on your life would be if the story ended here.

PRAYER

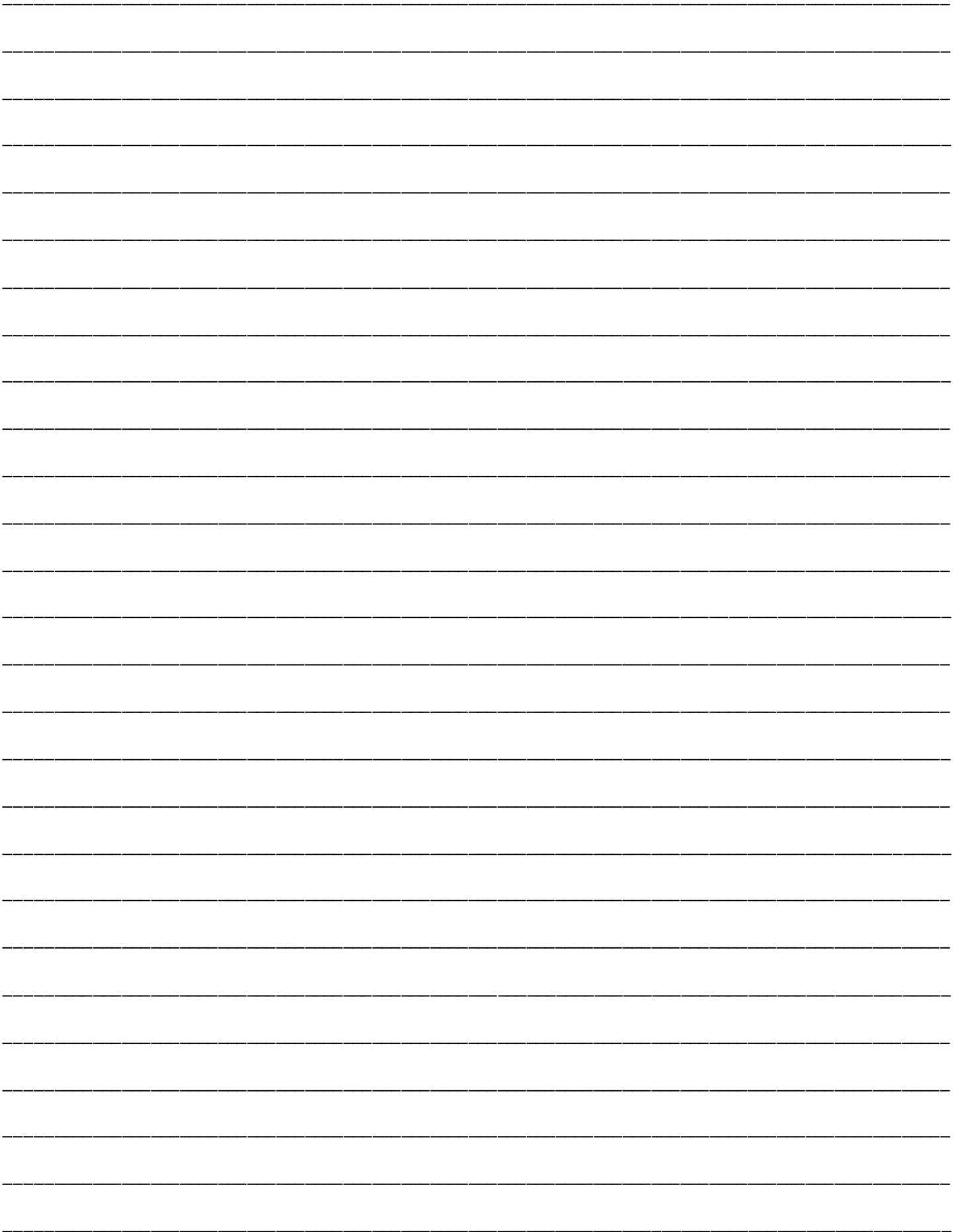
Dear Jesus, you walked into the darkest prison imaginable: the prison of death. You went there with the purpose to break the doors of that dark place wide open. Thank you for bringing light into darkness, life out of death. Amen.

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you consider the health of your own prayer life? Did you find ways throughout your daily life to incorporate your interaction with God by thinking of God often? Did you lay your needs before God and never tire of inviting God to participate in your day-to-day activities? Remember to journal your experiences and/or share with your group.

IN THE COMING WEEK

Begin each day in prayer and in remembrance that we are celebrating Easter week. Make a special effort during the week to be a reflection of all that Christ is, all that he has done for us, and all that he has and is teaching us. Next week, share with your group or with friends and family any special events and thoughts that came into your life. Journal your experiences.



The Worst Thing is Never the Last Thing

April 18 - 23, 2022

NOTE: Using different Bible translations may be helpful for these readings. For groups, reading aloud from the Common English Bible or The Message may help to clarify the meaning of some passages.

MONDAY Luke 24:1-12 – “He Isn’t Here, but Has Been Raised”

Even Jesus’ death didn’t dim the women’s loyalty. They returned to Jesus’ tomb “very early in the morning on the first day of the week.” They went to care for his body as soon as the Sabbath laws (which he had challenged) allowed. They didn’t find his body, but did find two men in gleaming clothes who said, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn’t here, but has been raised.” They reported this to the eleven, but true to form for their day, “their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn’t believe the women.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- How important is the resurrection of Jesus Christ to you personally? To the Christian faith?
- The holy messengers proclaimed, “He isn’t here, but has been raised.” Repeat those words and ponder the ways the empty tomb has shaped your life.
- Why wouldn’t the apostles believe the women?
- When Peter saw the empty tomb, what might have gone through his mind?
- How vital to your faith are the eyewitness reports that Jesus told his disciples in advance what would happen, as well as the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive?

PRAYER

Risen Jesus, the disciples didn’t believe the women, and they couldn’t recall your own words enough to believe them, either. Give me a heart that is attentive to your words and willing to believe them. Amen.

TUESDAY Luke 24:13-24 – Puzzled Followers: “They Didn’t Find His Body”

Just as Luke shared details about Jesus’ birth that no other gospel included, his research found this unique story about the resurrection day. Jesus, unrecognized, walked with two disciples discussing recent events. They were disillusioned (“we had hoped”), sad about the crucifixion, and stunned that some women said Jesus’ body was not in the tomb. Note that these two followers gave no sign that they believed the report—just that it puzzled them.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Based on these verses, how widespread was the awareness of Jesus’ suffering and death in Jerusalem? Why might this have had a significant impact on the spread of Christianity?
- Why didn’t the two disciples recognize Jesus? Scholar N. T. Wright noted that a common and strange feature of all the resurrection stories is that Jesus’ risen body seems to have been transformed. “It was the same, yet different – a mystery we shall perhaps never unravel until

we ourselves share the same risen life.” In what ways does Easter make you long to share that risen life, to experience dimensions that for now remain mysterious to us?

- What preconceived ideas might Cleopas have had about a messiah? What kinds of preconceived ideas can affect how we understand and live our Christian faith?
- Do we fully understand everything about the Bible? Do we trust the Bible even if our understanding might be flawed?
- Has God ever changed your understanding of some passages in the Bible? What factors brought about this new insight?

PRAYER

Loving Christ, when I am discouraged, disillusioned or disbelieving, please come and join me on the road. It is at those times in particular that I need your living, loving presence with me. Amen.

WEDNESDAY Luke 24:25-32 - “Weren’t our hearts on fire?”

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus interpreted for his discouraged followers “the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.” As he broke and blessed bread for them, they recognized him in a flash of insight and memory. His transformed body disappeared, but they joyfully realized that their hearts were “on fire” as Jesus made the Bible clear.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- How would you feel if Jesus, in person, explained the Bible to you?
- How would these disciples feel after Jesus appeared to them, having not believed in the resurrection? How must they have reacted when he disappeared?
- What spiritual “aha!” moments have you had in your walk of faith? When something painful and puzzling suddenly made more sense in the light of Jesus’ love and grace?
- The disciples urged Jesus to stay. How do we, as Christians, go about doing that? How have you learned to recognize his presence in the midst of everyday life?

PRAYER

Encouraging Jesus, I want you and need you, to be with me in my home life. Help me to remember to invite you to stay with me at every meal, and in every moment. Amen.

THURSDAY Luke 24:33-49 - “You Are Witnesses”

After meeting the risen Christ at Emmaus, the two disciples rushed back to share the news with the others. As they were speaking, Jesus himself appeared. Luke reported in detail that he was no ghost, but physically alive. Jesus again explained the Scriptures to the disciples and commissioned them to share his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. “You are witnesses,” he said, promising that God’s power would help them spread his message.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- In verse 48, who was Jesus speaking to?
- What does being a witness mean? How can we be witnesses for Christ?
- What kind of “testimony” does God seek?
- In what ways has your faith in Jesus changed your life? How is your life better as a result of your faith?
- What makes you believe Jesus has the authority and power to forgive sin?

PRAYER

Eternal Christ, I am so grateful that you conquered death and offer me the hope of resurrection! Help me to rejoice in that hope, and to be your witness, sharing that hope with others. Amen.

FRIDAY Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:1-8 – Wait for God’s Power

From the gospel of Luke, Jesus’ story continued directly into “volume 2,” the book of Acts. Before leaving earth, Jesus charged his followers to witness to him, but not based on their own courage or cleverness. Instead, they were to wait for the Holy Spirit’s power. Some have even suggested that instead of “Acts of the Apostles,” we might better call Luke’s second volume something like “the Acts of Jesus through the apostles.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- What was the key notion of the “strategic plan” Christ laid out for his followers? When will the plan be completed?
- What responsibility does each of us have to continue working on that plan? Do we, like the disciples of that time, have the Holy Spirit to help us carry out Christ’s plan?
- Jesus ordered his disciples “not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised.” We Americans tend to be driven and impatient people. How would you react if Jesus told you not to try to do important work for him on your own, without God’s power? Might some of us, perhaps unconsciously, tend to “go it alone? What are the risks associated with that? How do we prevent it?

PRAYER

Jesus, I love the sheer audacity of telling 120 people in a small Roman province that they should reach “to the end of the earth.” I love the Holy Spirit’s power that enabled them to carry out that mission. Give me that vision today, and that power. Amen.

SATURDAY Acts 1:9-14 – Not the End—But a Beginning

Luke wanted Theophilus (and all other readers) to know Jesus' story didn't end in Jerusalem with the cross and the resurrection, or even the ascension. The risen Jesus told his followers that the saving work he had begun would go on through the rest of human history and into eternity. The risen Lord left earth, but two men in white told them this was not the end of Jesus' story—he would return. His followers devoted themselves to prayer to prepare for the huge task that now lay before them.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- You have now read and discussed and/or reflected on Luke's story of the risen Christ. Is that story over? Is Jesus' plan for the world over? What will signal the culmination of his plan?
- If asked, could you tell someone else the story of the Christ – his life, suffering, death and resurrection? Could you recount the story of his love and saving grace? Are you willing to tell the story if the opportunity arises?
- Christ preached unity and love. Do you feel united with others, regardless of their race, color, ethnicity, gender, and background?
- The early Christians shared a spirit of unity and the practice of prayer as major features of community life. That same spirit of unity is as crucial for us to carry out the mission Jesus gave us as it was for them. In what ways can you cultivate a spirit of unity, not of division, in your service to God?

PRAYER

Eternal Risen Christ, Isaiah said you would be "the prince of peace." Help me, as a member of your diverse, worldwide family of believers, to live out the spirit of unity and peace your Spirit brought about in the first group of believers. Amen.

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you begin each day in prayer, remembering that this was Easter week? Did you seek during the week to reflect all that Christ is, all that he has done for us, and all that he has and is teaching us? Was the week special for you?

IN THE COMING WEEK

Easter week is over, but our Easter experience shouldn't be. Make a special effort to infuse the meaning of Easter into your day-to-day life. Find ways to daily increase your prayer time, extend love and kindness to others and seek peace and unity.

