



The Gospel of Luke



For Confirmation

By Rev. Ken Burgard



Confirmation Class,
As you read the Gospel of
Luke you might find these
study notes helpful. They
are not mandatory class
reading but they should
help open Luke up a bit
when you read.

Table of Contents

- 4 How to take good notes**
- 6 Introduction to the book of Luke**
- 8 Appendix A: Comparing Matthew to the other Gospels**
- 10 Appendix B: General tips on reading *any* book of the Bible**
- 11 Photo Credits**

How and Why to take Notes

Note-taking is central to learning for just about all of us. Why? Because reading material engages it on one level, but taking notes forces us to think about it critically (what *are* the important parts), and additionally writing the information down is a third level of engagement. Which tactic do you think is better? Which way are you more *connected* to the material you are reading?

	<u>Read Only</u>	<u>Read and Notes</u>
1st level connection	Reading the book	Reading the book
2nd level connection	Maybe a re-read?	Consider what's most important
3rd level connection	- none -	Take Notes your way
4th level connection	- none -	Review your notes later

You may be looking at this chart and thinking: “But I don’t need to do that, I remember everything I read really well.” And you know what, you’re absolutely right. You do remember what you read quite well, you remember it for days, weeks, and months *very* well. But will you remember it when you’re 40? 55? 70? That’s what note-taking can do for you. It moves the information into your deep memory, so that you’ll always have it. And if you don’t yet have experience being 40, please take it from someone who has passed that mark. Note taking works. It’s tedious, I will readily admit that, and you have to find a way to do it that works for you, but once you’ve got it. It works.

In the hopes that it helps, here is how I take notes:

- **Names:** I usually title my note sections with names, and record story points all in one go. So for example, I would record Genesis 2-5 and have a section for Adam, and a different sections for Eve, for Cain, and for Able.
- **Big Events:** Big events ONLY, get recorded in my notes. This makes it kind of fun to *forecast*. If I know it’s something that gets talked about at church all the time, like that thing with the apple in Genesis then I *know* that’s a “big event” so I record it. On the other hand, the murder of Able, by his brother Cain *might* be a big event, and it might not. Only further reading will tell, so it’s up to you whether or not *you think* that classifies as a ‘big event’ and how (or if) it needs noting.
- **Places:** I don’t spend a whole lot of time on places, honestly, but honestly, Bible maps can be a lot of fun to use in the right situations. Take this one for example: It traces all of the apostle Paul’s pit-stops on his first tour of spreading the gospel, the good news, from the book of Acts. My general rule for recording places is two fold: 1) write down locations that the bible repeatedly mentions (like more than 3 times), 2) record locations you are *personally* interested in,



because those locations, and those particular stories (your favorites) will be well worth looking up a map or two for. You don't have time to map the whole Bible, but map your favorite spots, it's fun.

- **Dates:** Dates are lame, and I don't record them. Sorry history majors, but memorizing dates is all that is wrong about history class, in my opinion. As long as you get the proper *sequence* of events down, you're fine. If this deeply offends you, here's my email, we can chat anytime: pastor@downsumc.org Make sure you date your message though =)
- **Quotes:** Here is note-taking gold. I record quotes for two reasons: 1) I found a sentence I particularly like and may want to consider memorizing, and 2) this sentence alone, will remind me of the *whole* story. You can go overboard here and quote too much, which will make your notes long and boring. Be *picky* about which quotes you use. And record chapter and verse, and record them word for word. You'll be glad you did.
- **Stories:** For Genesis 2-5 You could just record: * creation of Adam and Eve, * The snake-apple thing, * murder of Able. And that would be enough. Hopefully one of those 3 interests you more, and you may toss another sentence of description in there. But story notes are usually 'just the facts'. And I usually write which chapters in the Bible they are found in.
- **Insights:** If I am reading and the light comes on, I figure something out, or get a new perspective or point of view, I try to write that in my notes. Recording your personal insights make the notes *your* notes, and are VERY valuable to read later.
- **Questions:** Super important in note-taking. Write down your questions for 2 reasons 1) it's written down so you can go back and consider it later, 2) all good questions push us to a path of deeper study. Your best questions, will yield your best Bible study. Write your questions into your notes.
- **Artistry:** Now I readily admit this might be an odd quirk of mine, but I take *good looking* notes. If they are hand-written, I will sometimes doodle and draw pictures, and I use good quality paper (almost like a journal). I am creating *my own reference book* for the Bible. I want it to look good, I want it to be easy for me to look back at it later. Selfishly, I wouldn't mind if my friends saw my notes and though, hey those look neat.

Notes that I take on the computer I enhance with different fonts, sizes, bold, italics, underline, etc. I will go back and do image searches for my favorite stories and include clip art. Though... I would caution on Adam and Eve image searches.

For my very favorite stories, I consider other people's artistry as they have interpreted this passage. For the story of Adam and Eve alone, I can think of a wide variety of artwork that I have encountered surround this story, from Neil Morse's progressive rock album *One*, to Steven Schwartz's *Children of Eden* musical, or Michelangelo's depiction of Adam and God on the Sistine chapel, or even the many television or movie adaptations of the Bible story like *The Bible* (history channel).

I can almost guarantee, that if you have a favorite Bible story, you can find an artistic representation of it somewhere, in song, painting, book, film, or television. The Bible is the most-popular, most-widely read book in human history, and artists have been interacting with it for centuries. Take advantage of their work, and the unique perspectives it can bring (but only after you've read it yourself, that's why this is the last step in the list).

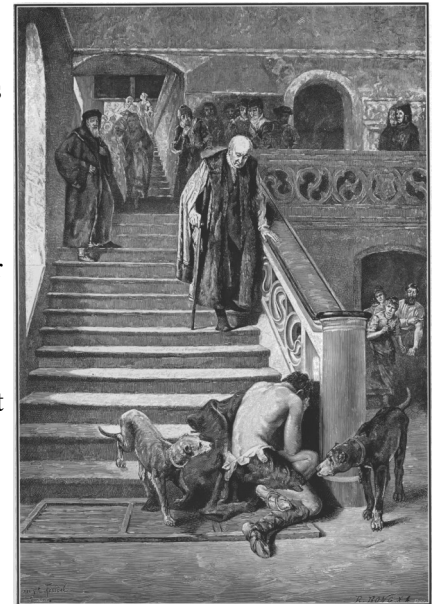
Notes on the Book of Luke

*Luke is the third book in the New Testament. It is one of four copies of the story of Jesus Christ, found in the Bible (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). If the book contains the story of Jesus it is called a **gospel** which means “good news”, as in “the is the book with the good news in it!”*

As Christians, we understand the person of Jesus to be the key to understanding all of the rest of scripture. It is the one story that influences all other stories. The Old Testament looks forward to Jesus, the New Testament tells Christ's story and then looks to see what happens after Jesus. Your goal on this first read is NOT to understand everything, but to begin to get a basic idea of the story of Christ. This is the moment when God came to earth, everything turns on this story. Remember, the goal is not to master the details, you'll read the story of Jesus *three more times* before you're done reading the Bible. Getting the *general feel* and major plot points of the story is what's important now.

We are beginning with Luke's version of the story of Jesus: For three good reasons: 1) it is the easiest of the gospels to read, 2) Luke does not assume that you are Jewish (which is good because most of us aren't), 3) Luke is written like a personal letter to one person, which is a third reason why it is one of the most easy to read books in scripture.

You are going to run into a lot of new vocabulary: Look it up, you have unprecedented access to information in this day and age, so use it. There are online dictionaries and resources that you could use to easily find the definitions to words that you don't understand. Here are a few vocabulary words that will help you:



The parable of the Prodigal Son, unique to Luke's gospel (ch 15)

- ⇒ **Synagogue:** This is a building, tent, or portion of a home, where first-century Jewish people would come to worship. There would be prayer, scripture reading, and often teaching based on that scripture. There are a lot of parallels to the synagogue, and the church worship service you attend on Sunday morning.
- ⇒ **Pharisee:** One of *four* sects of first century Jews. The Pharisees believed that strict following of the law of God (like to the letter) would bring the promised leader (the messiah) who would set their people free. They were major sticklers for the rules, almost to the point of following-the-rules is more important than why-we-follow-the-rules which is where Jesus challenges them.
 - * In case you're curious, the other three sects are mentioned a lot less in the Bible, but here they are:
 - * **Sadducee:** Where the Pharisees went with strict rule following, the Sadducees had more of a 'can't we all just get along' policy. They compromised their values to accommodate their Roman captors, and thereby attained positions of power. They also did not believe in resurrection.
 - * **Essene:** Think monastery, and you're closer to the idea of the Essenes. They *retreated* from the world into contemplation and mysticism. Their caves are gold mines for archaeologists. The Dead sea scrolls were found in an Essene excavation.
 - * **Zealots:** These were revolutionaries, attempting, for religious reasons, to fight and throw off the Roman oppressors. They did so with every means possible, in fact they were named for a certain style of knife that they used in their assassinations of Roman leaders.
- ⇒ **Scribe:** A wide-ranging word in the Bible that could be used to indicate any of the following: one who makes new copies of the scriptures, one who teaches the scriptures (like a Sunday School Teacher), one who teaches law (based on scriptures) and writes legal documents (like a lawyer).

Some of the Major Events in Luke

Christmas (ch 1-2)

The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6: 17-49)

Jesus sends the disciples out to minister on their own (Luke 9-10)

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10)

Stories of lost things and people (Luke 15)

Jesus enters Jerusalem and is executed (ch 19-23)

The Walk to Emmaus (ch 24)

Clearly these are not all of the major events in Luke, but some are shared here in order to help you get started in your note-taking.

Add to this list, other events and sections of the story that you feel are also “major events”. I take most of my notes now on the computer, but back in the day I used to use a simple 98 cent composition notebook.

What strikes you as relevant from Luke? What stories do you connect best with? What questions does the book leave you with? Record all of this, and by doing so, you’ll engage the book on a much deeper level.

One of the Pastor's favorite stories in Luke

The tale of Jesus and Zacchaeus

When I was growing up in children’s church, way too long ago, we sang a song about this little 10 verse story found in Luke 19:1-10. It was fun because it had hand motions, and you got to shout “Hey Zacchaeus, you come down from out of that tree!”

It was only when I went to seminary, and started to actually study scripture that I began to appreciate some of the striking imagery in the story. Typically you have to dig a bit into historical records to understand that tax gatherers were so unpopular at this time (and specifically why they were so), but that unpopularity is shown in the story. He’s a rich man, and should be afforded status (people should let him in front) but they aren’t. He’s so unpopular, no one is making way for him, that he has to climb a tree to see Jesus. AND THEN, out of the whole crowd, it’s Zacchaeus, not the church leaders, or the righteous people, who Jesus decides to spend time with.

And on top of that, he immediately tells a parable about *money* in the next verses (11-17). Considering Zacchaeus’s position in the town, his job with regard to finances, and his unpopularity (again with regard to money), I absolutely believe that this story of a short-rich man nobody likes, and this parable about making good use of what God has given us, are *supposed* to be linked together by the reader. This is not a connection you could make by just reading one or the other. Only when you read the whole book, can you notice their placement together like this.

4 Matthew Mark Luke John Gospels

The New Testament begins with not one, but four tellings of the story of Jesus. They are called the “gospel” meaning that they contain the good news of the story of Jesus Christ. Why four? Well in Old Testament Law, you needed a minimum of 2 witnesses in court to prove guilt or innocence, so anything more than 2 just makes a stronger case. Also consider that each author, while imparting truth and history, also shares their own unique point of view. The church has found great value in all four of these points of view.

We have chosen these four OVER many other tellings of Christ that are in the ancient world because they meet some important criterion. First: They’re old (written either by someone who was alive and around when Jesus was, or someone who studied at the feet of such a person). *Lots* of the “other gospels” (that didn’t make it into the Bible) weren’t even written till 500 years or more after Easter! Second: They are consistent with one another (they don’t contradict one another), AND they are consistent with the Old Testament. Third: the Holy Spirit shines quite brightly in these works. People can read them and come to faith in Jesus Christ.

A great mistake that is often made in our church is that we read these all together, and then fail to read them separately on subsequent reads. Taking material unique to Luke (like the shepherds presence at the birth of Jesus), and material unique to Matthew (like the wise men’s presence at the infancy of Jesus) and we kind of ‘frankengospel’ them together (because it makes for a pretty nativity set). That’s OK to do, if you’re trying to get all the *facts* and reconstruct the Jesus story as best as you can, it’s a good task for a fledgling Christian. But it becomes a mistake if in our maturity, and as we grow in scripture reading we do not read them individually. True, they all tell the same story, but they do so from very different perspectives, and with somewhat different goals.

That’s why this Lent we are *ONLY* reading from the gospel of Matthew. It gives us a chance to take a look at Jesus from that particular perspective. On the next page, I’ve shared with you *my opinion* on which theory of gospel writing makes the most sense to me. Seriously, people spend a lot of time on this, and I’m just sharing a *theory* (of which there are several) that I was taught in seminary. It’s called the *Four Document Hypothesis*.

How the gospels might have been written

If you are looking at these pictures and thinking "What is with the animals? Then I will refer you to the book of Revelation chapter 4 to see if you can puzzle out some of the apocalyptic symbolism that is informing some of the art of these old paintings.

MARK: is the oldest of the four stories, and therefore the first of the batch to think *we have to get this on PAPER!* His story is also the shortest, and it is very miracle-focused. Mark is very interested in helping you recognize that Jesus was divine in origin, not just a normal everyday teacher.



Mark was used as source material for the later writings of both Matthew and Luke.



Q

We also believe that there is another document out there somewhere that is not a "gospel" but a collection of Jesus's sayings. Scholars call it Q, and even though we haven't found it yet, we believe that BOTH Matthew and Luke had access to it when they wrote.



So then **Matthew** takes *Mark* and *Q* and his own unique material/experience and writes his gospel. It focuses a LOT on Jesus' words and sayings, and it also takes great pains to connect the reader's understanding of Jesus with the Old Testament. Matthew assumes you are very familiar with the OT and quotes it a LOT. You could say he assumes a *Jewish* audience.

Which means **Luke** takes *Mark* and *Q* and his own unique material/experience and writes his gospel. It focuses a lot on the poor, the forgotten, it's a lot about class and status and the radical equality that we all have before God. It does NOT assume you know and have read the Old Testament and takes the time to explain things a bit more. You could say he assumes a *non-Jewish* audience.



"But what about me? I wrote one too?"

Don't worry **John** we haven't forgotten about you, but to be fair, your gospel is the *youngest* of the four which means you likely had access to *Mark*, *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *Q* when you wrote yours. It gave you the freedom none of the other authors had. Because the story had already been told, and told well by three others, you were inspired to tell the story not with a focus on "who, what when, where why?" but with a focus on *teaching theology*. And for that we are very grateful (no other book is like yours), but it makes your gospel a *little different* than the other three.

General Tips for Bible Reading

I know you're already a well-seasoned reader of the Bible, but it is always good to have a quick reminder about Bible reading. I know I often need to be reminded myself.

Always begin with prayer. Invite God into your read. The story is big and emotional, and sometimes hard to follow, prayer will help you focus, and allow the Holy Spirit to read with you.

Read it like a book. We have gotten into the bad habit in our culture of lifting up "key verses" and reading the bible in small and disjointed sections. Don't do that, the Bible is not a collection of sentences, it is a book, so read it like a book. Don't let subtitles and chapter numbers tell you when to stop. You decide when the natural stopping points in the story are.

This also applies to the subtitles over the sections of the Bible (if you have them). They are editorial additions into the scripture. They do not show up in the original text and can be completely ignored (again they're just there to help you find a certain spot if you're thumbing through).

Take notes: Yes, I know it sounds like school, but I promise you it's worth it. And here's the good news, nobody is grading you, so you only need to take notes *about the stuff you think* is most important. What's worth writing down? All the basic stuff: main characters, plot points, locations, PLUS your own opinion of each of them, and anything else that you find significant.

If you have a study Bible: Read the Introduction to the book; they are often very helpful overviews and very helpful in placing you into the story. Don't get lost in the notes. Too much time in the notes can make you lose the pace and the feel of the story. Go ahead and finish the whole section and *then* go back and look at the notes. Only stop your read if you're confused and don't know what something is.

No matter what kind of Bible you have: Pay attention. If you find yourself 'zoning out' then take a break, and come back and finish the section later. Some parts are just hard to read, even if you're reading the 'story portions'; don't 'muscle through' a section, because you risk missing a great deal.

In all your work... MAKE IT YOURS: This book was written *for you*. God inspired people to write it *for you*. Now it's yours. You have it, and it's your time to read, learn, and engage the Word of God. So do *whatever you need to do* to make it yours. Take notes, make charts, draw pictures, rent Biblical movies based on the books you just read (though I do recommend reading the books first). Try reading it out loud if you need a change of pace (many books of the Bible were actually intended to be read aloud, or even performed as a play)

Pay special attention to the parts that resonate more deeply with you. Don't feel guilty about sections that you don't connect as well with. It's OK to have favorite and least favorite episodes. That is the nature of such a long story, some parts will mean more to you than others. One of the greatest joys of reading scripture is being able to share one of those sections with someone, and then to hear one of theirs.

When it bugs you, and it will (there are complex moral issues in this book), don't give up on it. The bible can walk a solid PG-13 rating for whole sections and occasionally dip into some seriously R rated content here and there. There are ethical situations rooted in cultures and ways of life that are thousands of years apart from our own, who had daily concerns much different from our own.

The Bible contains some of the best literature in the world, *and* it is one of the primary ways we encounter God. When it moves you, and it will, then be in prayer. Take some extra time that day to inhabit the story, try to imagine what you are reading. Think about what connected with you and be open to the very real possibility that God is speaking to you through scripture.

Photo Credits

Cover: Photo permission through the church's *lightstock.com* license.

How and Why to take Notes: The Bible map comes from the *Logos Deluxe Map Set* on Logos Software.

The Gospel of Luke: The prodigal son image comes from *the Bible and its story Volume 9*

Four Document Hypothesis: Mark (a miniature from *Grandes Hures of Anne of Brittany*), Matthew (*St. Matthew and the angel* by Guido Reini), Luke (From an Illuminated Armenian Gospel with Eusebian Canons), John (_____)