

Introduction to Luke's Gospel

Introduction

Why are we reading Luke together this term?

We want to be a church that is continually growing in our love for the Lord Jesus. What better way to do that than to be reading a gospel together this term and encouraging each other in what we learn.

Why are we studying Luke together this term?

Small groups are the natural place for people to discuss what they have been reading. They are the obvious place to share encouragements, questions and applications. It made sense therefore for home groups to run in parallel to the Bible reading plan.

Why have we chosen these particular passages to study?

Each week you will be studying a passage that everyone will have read in the previous week or so. We have tried to pick passages that are key to each section of Luke. We have also tried to pick passages that help us as we seek to follow and love Jesus more and more.

Group Work - Luke 1:1-4

What is Luke's Gospel?

- ***An Orderly Account...***

- ***Fulfilment of Old Testament (1:1)*** --> Show especially in the early chapters - e.g. 1:55, 1:76-79 (Isaiah 40, 9), 3:4-6 (Isaiah 40), 4:16-21 (Isaiah 61 and Isaiah 58)

- ***Testimony of Eye Witnesses (1:2)*** --> show where that comes up - Acts 1:8, 1:22.

Can you see these 2 themes of Old Testament Fulfilment and Eye Witness testimony in 24:44-49? (notice how the themes at the beginning of Luke bookend with the themes at the end of the book.)

- ***Structure*** - not pearls on a string. Easy to see the structure in Acts, bit harder in Luke but it is there.

- *Luke - 9:51 - Luke divides in 2 halves - each made up of different sections. I'll say more of this in the notes. Knowing the structure is key when we're dropping into Luke at different points. We need to be really clear on where we are and what is going on around us, otherwise we'll end up moving away from Luke and his purpose.*
- **Luke-Acts - 24:46-47** - Remember that Luke is volume 1 and Acts is volume 2 and they go together. 24:46-47 act as the hinge between the 2.

How has Luke put together his Gospel?

- **Carefully Investigated (1:3)** - spoken to the eye witnesses
 - *Big on Detail. e.g. 1:11, 2:1-2, 3:1-2, 24:36-43 (do this in groups)*

Why has Luke written his gospel?

- **Certainty (1:4)**
 - **About What?**
 - *It stacks up Historically - Eye Witnesses*
 - *It stacks up Biblically - Old Testament Fulfilment*
 - **So What?**
 - **For Ourselves**
 - **To Share it with others - 24:47 --> Acts.**
 - *So we're not just reading Luke for ourselves. We're also reading it so that we might then share the certain good news that we find with others.*

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 2:22-40

Context

- *Old Testament*
 - Simeon and Anna represent the faithful remnant of God's people who were trusting and waiting for God's promised salvation. Throughout books such as Isaiah God had been making great promises of how he would send his Messiah to rescue, redeem and comfort his people. What is more this coming salvation would not just be for Israel but rather it would be a salvation for all nations. There are many places we can go in the Old Testament to see this. In some ways the whole of Isaiah 40-66 focus on these themes. See for example see Isaiah 40:1-11, Isaiah 52:7-10, Isaiah 60:1-3.
- *Luke 1:1-4*
 - In these verses Luke told us his aim was that his readers might have **certainty** about the things we have been taught. Luke's aim is to increase our confidence in who Jesus is and what he has accomplished.
 - Luke wants us to be certain about the historical truth of what happened and so he "carefully investigated" what the eye witnesses had seen and heard.
 - Luke also wants us to be certain about the theological truth of the gospel and so he wrote his gospel as an orderly account concerning "the things that have been **fulfilled** among us." Luke wants us to be confident that Jesus really is the fulfilment of all God's Old Testament promises. This means that we should not ignore the Old Testament references and allusions in Luke's gospel. Luke has purposefully included them so that we can have certainty.
 - The fact that Luke's aim is to give us certainty means that as we read through Luke's gospel one of the application questions that we should always be asking is, **"How does this passage help to give us certainty/confidence in Jesus and the gospel?"**
- *Luke 1-2*
 - These chapters are Luke's introduction to the whole gospel. In these chapters he is introducing us to who Jesus is and what he is going to do! Throughout these chapters we hear different people telling us about Jesus. First we Angels tell us about Jesus and his mission (1:30-33, 2:11), then Prophets tell us about Jesus and his mission (2:29-35, 38), and then finally the climax of the introduction comes as we hear Jesus speak for himself (2:49).
 - Throughout these chapters certain themes emerge;
 - Jesus is God's Son - 1:32, 2:11, 2:49.
 - Jesus is the Messiah/Christ/Greater David - 1:32-33, 2:11, 2:26.
 - Jesus is God's Promised Salvation - 1:46-55, 1:68-75, 2:11, 2:30-32, 2:38.
 - Response to Jesus of Thanks and Praise to God as well as Amazement - 2:13, 2:18, 2:20, 2:28, 2:33, 2:38, 2:47.
 - We need to remember that Luke has written an orderly account. These are not just random stories that he has thrown together. He has carefully ordered his material to build up his message. We must not study 2:22-40 in isolation, instead we need to read it in the light of the rest of chapters 1-2.

Structure

• **v22-24 - Mary and Joseph**

- **Their Religious Devotion** - Mary and Joseph are presented to us as religiously devout Jewish parents (see also 2:41-42.) Repeatedly in these verses we are told that they are doing what the Law required (see 2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39.) There are three particular things that they are doing;
 - The Purification of the Mother 40 days after childbirth (see v22 --> Leviticus 12:1-6)
 - The Presenting of the firstborn child to God (see v22-23 --> Exodus 13:1-16 and Numbers 18:15-16). This ceremony was a reminder to Israel that they were a rescued people as it pointed back to the Exodus. This is significant because it is in the middle of this ceremony that Simeon will interrupt and declare that Jesus is God's salvation (v30). Jesus is God's ultimate salvation. He will accomplish the Great Exodus!
 - The Dedication of the child to the Lord's Service (see 1 Samuel 1-2.) This is seen by the fact that they did not need to bring the child to the temple to fulfil Exodus 13:1-16. By bringing Jesus to the temple they were not simply offering the necessary sacrifice, they were dedicating him to God as Hannah did with Samuel.
- **Their Poverty** - Leviticus 12:1-8 tells us that the woman was to bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtle dove for a sin offering but "if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtle doves or two pigeons..." The implication from Luke 2:22-24 is that Mary and Joseph were poor because they offered two birds instead of a bird and a lamb. This is a further reminder to us that Jesus was not born into a rich and comfortable family. As Ryle says, "he ate a poor man's food, and wore a poor man's apparel, and worked a poor man's work, and shared in all a poor man's troubles."

• **v25-35 - Simeon**

• **Who is Simeon?**

- **Righteous and Devout** - Simeon is held up for us as a godly man. By saying that he is righteous Luke is not saying that he was perfect. Instead he is righteous compared to the general population. Luke is presenting Simeon to us as part of the faithful, godly remnant of Israel who are waiting patiently for God's promised salvation/consolation (see Isaiah 40:1-2). Indeed Simeon speaks of himself in v29 as like a Watchman who has been watching and waiting for God's salvation. Now he has seen this salvation arrive Simeon is ready to be dismissed from his post.
 - **Filled by the Spirit** - v25-27 are striking because throughout the Old Testament the Holy Spirit only came upon a few people at certain times for certain specific tasks. Simeon is filled with the Spirit and he has received a special revelation from the Holy Spirit that he will see God's Promised Rescuing Messiah before he dies. What is more it is the Spirit who causes him to go to the temple at just the right moment so that he actually sees Jesus. Although Simeon is not described as a prophet he is a Spirit-filled man who has received a special revelation and who then speaks a spirit-inspired prophecy concerning Christ. After centuries of prophetic silence suddenly there are now 2 prophets speaking in the same place on the same day about the same child - this is a big deal!
- #### • **What does he say?**
- **Jesus is God's Promised Rescue and Revelation for All (v29-32)**
 - It is striking that as Simeon takes hold of the baby Jesus he doesn't say "my eyes have seen the one who will bring your salvation." Instead he says "my eyes have

seen your salvation." Jesus is God's salvation and this is a theme that we have seen as we have read through chapters 1-2 (see Context.)

- No one should be surprised by this salvation because God has "prepared it in the sight of all nations." That is Simeon's way of saying that this salvation has been publicly prepared and foreshadowed throughout Israel's history, the whole Old Testament has been building up to the coming of this baby.
- Although Simeon repeats many of the themes that we have seen already in ch1-2 he does introduce something new - namely the fact that God's Salvation in Jesus is not just for Israel but for all people (v32.) Jesus will bring light and sight to the nations who have been blind and in the darkness (see Isaiah 60:1-3). As a result Jesus will also bring glory to Israel because it is out of Israel that God's Salvation for the world will come.

- **Jesus will be a stumbling block who brings division (v34-35)**

- If v29-32 is the good news about Jesus then v34-35 are in some ways the bad news about Jesus.
- Jesus will cause the rising and falling of many which echoes Isaiah 8:14-15 and 28:13-16. Throughout the New Testament Isaiah's language of Jesus as a stumbling block is picked up to explain why so many (particularly the religious establishment of Israel) stumble over Jesus (see Luke 1:52-53, 4:28-29, 6:20-26, 12:51, 13:28-29, 13:33-35, 16:25, 18:9-14, 19:44, 19:47-48, 20:14-18 and 20:17-18.)
- As we will see increasingly as we move through Luke's gospel Jesus will be spoken against (2:34--> 4:28-29). Jesus will also not only bring true light/ revelation of God (2:32) he will also reveal people's hearts and where they truly stand before God (2:35). Finally Jesus will bring particular person pain for Mary (2:35.) We see something of this in the very next episode (2:48-50) but ultimately this prophecy for Mary is fulfilled at the cross.

- **v36-38 - Anna**

- **Who is Anna?**

- **Devoted to God** - Like Simeon, Anna is presented as a devoted, faithful and godly. She is an old woman who has been waiting patiently for God's promised redemption.

- **What does she say?**

- **Jesus is God's Promised Redemption** - The similarities between what Simeon and Anna said are striking. Both of them direct their praise and thanks to God (see 2:28, 2:38 and the Shepherds in 2:20.) They also both speak about God's promised Salvation (compare 2:25, 2:30-32 and 2:38.) In this way Simeon and Anna are presented as a Prophetic Double-Act and their message reiterates and builds on the angels messages that we have already heard in ch1-2.

Tricky Bits

- ***Why did Mary and Joseph marvel at what was said about Jesus? (v33)***

- At first it might seem strange that after all they had been told by the angels (see Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38) Mary and Joseph would be surprised by what Simeon had said. There are several reasons for them to marvel at what Simeon had said.

- Firstly wouldn't you be surprised when a complete stranger randomly comes up to you in a busy place, takes hold of your baby and tells everyone that your baby is God's salvation for the world? From what we see in the gospels it took Mary a long time to come to terms with this and fully grasp not only who Jesus was but also exactly what he had come to do.
- Secondly they may have been specifically marvelling at what Simeon had said about Jesus being a light for revelation for the Gentiles. They may have been marvelling at the fact that their child would not only be salvation for Israel but for all people.
- ***How could Jesus grow in wisdom and be filled with wisdom when he was the perfect Son of God? (2:40 and 2:52.)***
 - This might come up either in your study or as a result of people's own reading. Although the relationship between Jesus' humanity and divinity is mind-stretching try not to get too bogged down with it.
 - Jesus was 1 person but he had 2 natures, a divine nature and a human nature.
 - In his divine nature he was the perfect, eternal, all-knowing, all-wise Word and Son of God. This means that in his divine nature he could not grow in knowledge and wisdom because he already possess perfect wisdom.
 - In his human nature he was just like us. He was a child who grew physically and mentally just like us. We see in 2:46-48 that he had to learn like us.
 - Wherever we come across verses in the gospels where it talks about Jesus growing in knowledge, or growing tired or hungry or not knowing something it is talking about his human nature rather his divine nature.

Big Idea

Jesus is God's promised rescue and revelation for everyone but not everyone will be for Jesus.

Suggested Areas of Application

- Remember Luke's big aim in writing his gospel, he wants us to have certainty. This passage gives us certainty about at least 2 things;
- **1st - We can be certain that Jesus is for everyone!**
 - For those who are not yet Christians the application is;
 - Receiving Jesus means being humble enough to recognise that we need Jesus - are you humble enough to recognise you need rescuing?
 - For those of us who are Christians the applications include;
 - Everyone needs Jesus so what are we doing to reach all people with the good news of Jesus? (We need to think this through as individuals, as groups and as a whole church.)
 - Don't be surprised when people (often those you least expect) receive Jesus! Jesus is for everyone so we shouldn't give up on people or think that they would never be interested in Jesus. Are there people who we have given up on? Are there people we have never spoken to about Jesus because we don't think they will be interested? What are you going to do about this?

- **2nd - We can be certain that not everyone will be for Jesus!**
 - This means that we should not be too surprised or discouraged when people reject Jesus. Throughout the Bible the rejection of Jesus has been prophesied. That means that God is still in control and his plan is still on track even when people reject Jesus.
 - Again we shouldn't be surprised when following Jesus involves rejection and pain. If Jesus was spoken against then as Christians we shouldn't be surprised to find that we too will be spoken against. Are you experiencing this at the moment? What do you need to remember from this passage? What encouragements can you take from what we have learnt in these first few chapters of Luke?

Suggested Bible Study

- There are two ways that you could lead a study on this passage.
 - The first way is you could simply use the 6 basic Bible Reading Questions on the bookmark as the basis for your study. Hopefully people will have studied this passage in the previous week using these questions and so you might want to have an open discussion of the passage using those questions, and a few of your own, to help you all study the passage together.
 - The second way is to have a more traditional Bible study and I've included some questions that you might want to use or adapt.

Starter Questions

1. Reading the Bible Together Discussion Time

We really want the small groups to be a place where people can talk about what we have been reading as we go through Luke's gospel together. As a result it would be good to spend 5-10 minutes at the start of each session giving people the chance to talk about what they have been reading. Give people the opportunity to share what they have been learning as they have been reading Luke. Ask if anyone has any particular questions. Invite people to share the things they have learnt that have encouraged them, challenged them or changed them.

2. What sort of things are you certain about and why?

In 1:4 Luke tells us that he wrote his gospel so that we might have certainty. This starter question is designed to get us thinking about the whole idea of certainty. Perhaps you can think of an activity that your group could do to explore the idea of certainty. Either way it is important to see that the big aim of reading and studying Luke this term is so that we might have certainty about Jesus and the gospel.

Digging into the Passage

3. What do we learn about;

1. Mary and Joseph? (v22-24, 33, 39.)

2. Simeon? (v25-35)

3. Anna? (v36-38)

1. What sort of people are they?

2. What matters to them?

You might like to split the group into 3 small groups to answer these questions. Each group could either focus on all the characters or just one character (best to do Mary and Joseph together.)

These questions are designed to get us into the text and picking up on the details of the passage. Tell people not to worry if they don't know what everything means. The important details will come out through the study.

Hopefully people should start to see that Mary and Joseph are religiously devout (look how many times we are told that they did what the law required.) We also see that Simeon and Anna are good, upright, faithful people who have been waiting patiently for a long time to see God's rescuer. It's no surprise therefore that they are so happy to finally see Jesus!

4. Why are Simeon and Anna so excited about Jesus? (v29-32 & v38)

1. Who is he?

2. What is he going to do?

3. Who is he for?

Again these questions are designed to get us looking at the passage and engaging with the details of the passage.

- *Jesus is the Messiah/Christ (v26 - God's chosen rescuing King)*
- *He's God's Salvation for everyone not just Israel (v30-32)*
- *He's going to be a light and revelation to a world that is blind and in darkness (v32 - remember that when the Bible talks about blindness and darkness it's almost always talking about spiritual blindness)*
- *He's going to redeem his people (v38)*

5. What different responses will Jesus receive? (v34-35)

This question is important because we need to see that although Jesus brings salvation for everyone he will not be received by everyone. Whilst some will humbly and joyfully receive Jesus others will reject Jesus and be exposed in judgment by him. Right from the start of his gospel Luke wants us to see that Jesus is a divisive figure.

- *He's going to bring division (v34)*
- *He's going to be hated by some (v34)*
- *He will reveal people's hearts and where they really stand with God (v35)*
- *He will bring a particular pain to Mary (v35)*
- *Some people will respond to Jesus with humility and great joy (like Simeon and Anna) but others will reject him and fall because they refuse to accept him and the rescue he brings (v34-35.)*

Applying the Passage

6. This passage has shown us that Jesus is God's Salvation for Everyone.

1. What would our lives look like if we really believed this?

2. What would our church look like if we really believed this?

These questions are meant to be provocative. As Christians we would all say that we believe that Jesus is God's Salvation for everyone and yet the way I live my life says I don't believe this. My guess is that many of us say we believe that Jesus is God's salvation for everyone but our lives don't back this up. Let's spend time being honest about this and trying to help each other to make practical changes so that our lives begin to reflect the fact that we really do believe that Jesus is God's salvation for everyone.

7. This passage has shown us that Jesus will not be accepted by Everyone.

1. How do we normally feel when people reject the gospel?

2. How does this passage encourage us when we experience rejection because of Jesus?

This passage warns us to expect rejection. If Jesus was reject by some people then we will be rejected by people too. When someone rejects the gospel or is even just indifferent to the gospel I usually take it very personally. This passage reminds me rejection is to be expected and that it's not personal.

Luke wrote his gospel so that we might have certainty. I think there are at least 2 things we can be certain of as a result of this passage. Firstly we can be certain that Jesus is for everyone. Secondly we can be certain that not everyone will accept Jesus and so this is actually an encouragement to me when rejection comes.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 4:14-30

Context

- *Old Testament*
 - Luke is keen to show us how Jesus is the fulfilment of the OT (1:1.) This passage is key for this as Jesus take a key promise from Isaiah and claims that it is fulfilled in him (4:21.)
 - Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2 and alludes to Isaiah 58:6. In Isaiah these verses with their metaphors from the economic, political, physical and social realms were used to express the expectation of the total reversal of the fate of Israel." (Pao). This means that in their original context these verses use metaphors to point to God's salvation for his people in Babylon. This is important because some people read these verses and say that Jesus was only concerned with financial poverty, physical blindness, and literal oppression and imprisonment. Yet to say this is to go against the original meaning of the words in Isaiah where they are all to do with God's salvation of his people and not just a social or economic agenda.
- *Luke*
 - In ch4-6 we are in a section where the big themes are Jesus' identity (see 4:1-13, 4:22, 5:21, 6:5), Jesus' teaching ministry(4:14-21, 4:43-44, 6:17-49.) In many ways our passage introduces us to Jesus' teaching and also shows us something of the reaction that Jesus and his ministry will receive. In our passage Jesus quotes Isaiah to tell us exactly what sort of ministry he has come to do. That makes this a key passage that we need to understand if we are going to understand who Jesus is and what he came to do.
 - The theme of rejection and trying to kill Jesus that emerges in this passage (4:28-29) will sadly grow and grow as we move on through the gospel (see 6:11, 9:21-22, 9:51-56, 11:14-16 etc.)
 - In this passage Jesus defines his ministry by using the quotation from Isaiah and he will return to this quotation in 7:18-23 to reassure John the Baptist that Jesus really is the one who was to come.

Structure

- **v14-15 - Jesus the Famous Preacher**
 - **"The Power of the Spirit"** - As we are introduced to Jesus in chs3-4 we are repeatedly told that Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit (3:22, 4:1, 4:14, 4:18.) As we saw at Jesus' baptism, Father, Son and Spirit are in this rescue mission together. Jesus is both the Son beloved Son of the Father and the Spirit empowered Servant.
 - **"News about him spread"** - We might assume that Jesus became famous because of his miracles and yet in 4:14-15 Luke tells us that it was his teaching in the synagogue that brought him to everyone's attention. Jesus was clearly performing miracles (see 4:23) but it was his Spirit-powered teaching (4:15) and gracious words (4:22) that was getting everyone's attention. Notice also the repeated references to proclamation in the quote from Isaiah (4:18-19). Jesus clearly saw that his teaching was more important than his miracles (4:42-44.) His miracles were not an end in themselves but rather were used to serve his teaching ministry.

- **v16-22 - Jesus the Spirit Anointed Rescuer**

- **Are these verses about Social Action or Salvation or Both?** - People have developed a vast theology called Liberation Theology based on one particular interpretation of these verses. It is therefore very important for us to understand exactly what Jesus meant by these verses.
 - As we saw in the context section the quotation from Isaiah uses blindness, poverty and imprisonment as different metaphors for Israel's need for salvation. This means that it would be wrong to say that Jesus was just concerned about material poverty, physical blindness and literal imprisonment.
 - If Jesus had just come for those who were materially poor then why does he reach out to and welcome rich people like Zaccheus? (19:1-10, see also 5:27-30, 8:3.)
 - Similarly if Jesus had just come to set literal prisoners free then why does he do nothing for John the Baptist when he is imprisoned by Herod? (see 3:19-20 and 8:18-23.)
 - Jesus clearly did come to give literal sight to the blind (18:35-43) but physical miracles such as these pointed to Jesus' greater task which was to bring spiritual sight to the spiritually blind. Similarly Jesus does care for the materially poor (11:41, 12:33 and 14:13) but his ultimate concern is for those who are spiritually poor (6:20 and 2 Corinthians 8:9.)
 - All this means that whilst Christians should care for the materially poor, imprisoned, oppressed and physically blind our primary concern (like Jesus') should be for people's spiritual poverty, imprisonment, oppression and blindness. Too often the church has focused on the physical and material aspect of these verses at the expense of the spiritual aspect.
- **Why did Jesus leave out the judgment in Isaiah 61:2?**
 - When a part of the OT is quoted like it is here it is always worth going back and reading the verses in their original context. When you go back and read Isaiah 61:1-2 you realise that Jesus cut v2 short. As a result Jesus has left out the words "... and the day of vengeance of our God." The question is why?
 - I think the answer is that Jesus wants us to distinguish between what Jesus did in his first coming "proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (i.e. salvation)" and what he will do when he comes again "the day of vengeance of our God." From Isaiah's perspective you couldn't distinguish between Jesus' 1st and 2nd comings. This seems to be something that John the Baptist struggled with (see 7:18-23.) John was clearly expecting Jesus to bring both salvation and judgment at the same time and so he was in danger of stumbling because he couldn't understand why Jesus was only announcing salvation and not judgment.
- **In what sense were these verses fulfilled by Jesus on that day?**
 - As Jesus walked around Galilee preaching and teaching (4:15, 4:31, 4:43-44) he was declaring the salvation that Isaiah had prophesied. Originally Isaiah 61 was concerned with the Babylonian exile which had ended and yet in a bigger sense the spiritual exile of humanity from God that began at the fall had not ended. Jesus had come as the sinless second Adam (4:1-13) to end the exile and bring salvation not just to the Jews but to all people. Here is the one that history has been waiting for!

- **v22-30 - Jesus the Rejected Hometown Boy**

- **Jesus knows what they're really thinking** - Although the synagogues are amazed at his words they are also confused because of his humble origins (see v22.) Jesus knows what they are really thinking. Nazareth have heard about the miracles that Jesus had done in Capernaum (v23) and they feel they deserve similar miracles because they are his hometown. Whether they want to be entertained by the miracles or whether they want to see miracles to validate his claim in v21 is debatable. The point is that they are making demands of Jesus and refusing to accept his message. Although it is Jesus speaking in v23-24 his assessment of them is clearly accurate as we see when they try and kill him in v28-30.
- **Jesus is rejected by his home town but he will be received by those you wouldn't expect** - It is shocking to think that they people who had seen Jesus grow up are the first people in Luke's gospel to reject him. On one level you could say that this is because 'familiarity breeds contempt' and yet in the light of Jesus' words in v18-19 there is surely something deeper going on here. Surely the ultimate reason that these people reject him and try and kill him is because they are spiritually poor, blind and imprisoned and yet they refuse to acknowledge this. Ultimately they reject Jesus because they are too proud to admit that they need the salvation that he has come to bring. In this way they are just like Israel in Elijah and Elisha's day and so just as Elijah and Elisha went to the Gentiles, so Jesus' offer of salvation will not just be for Israel but for all nations.

Tricky Bits

- ***Doesn't their two reactions in v22 seem contradictory?***
 - It seems odd that people are both amazed and yet also questioning and possibly grumbling in the same verse.
 - It is worth looking closely at exactly what it is that they are amazed at - "the gracious words that came from his lips." They are impressed by his rhetoric and teaching but they are ultimately unmoved because of his ancestry. This reminds us that you can be impressed by Jesus and say nice things about him and yet be totally unmoved (even hardened) by him. Ultimately their amazement and praise is only skin deep and superficial.
- ***Has Luke got the order of events wrong in v23?***
 - In v23 Jesus alludes to miracles he is meant to have already done in Capernaum and yet the first time Luke tells us that Jesus goes to Capernaum is not until 4:31. Some people seize upon this and say that Luke has done a sloppy job of cutting and pasting his material from other gospels.
 - There is a much simpler explanation. Capernaum was a major town in Galilee with a Synagogue (see 4:31.) In 4:14-15 we have just been told that Jesus was on a preaching tour of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues. This makes it perfectly possible that Jesus had been to Capernaum on this preaching tour and that he had done miracles there. Luke, who is writing an orderly account with a specific purpose in mind, has simply chosen not to record the details of those miracles for us.
- ***What does "Physician heal yourself mean?"***
 - On the surface this sounds odd because then they would be telling Jesus to heal himself. This is possible but a more likely interpretation is to paraphrase the parable as something along the lines of "You profess so now produce." It's the classic challenge of "Put up or shut up."

- **Why allude to the OT stories about Elijah and Elisha?**
 - These OT stories illustrate how prophets have often been rejected by their own (4:24.) Just as Nazareth are rejecting Jesus, so also Elijah and Elisha were rejected by the majority of Israel in their day.
 - These two stories also show what God will do when Israel reject his prophet or Messiah - he will make the blessings of salvation available to Gentiles too. This is a theme that we see time and again in Luke's second volume of Acts when the rejection of the gospel by Jews leads to the gospel being shared with and accepted by Gentiles.
- **Is v30 a miraculous escape?**
 - Possibly and yet Luke tends to leave us in no doubt when a miracle has occurred.
 - Regardless of whether this is miraculous or not the bigger point is to show that whilst opposition and hostility to Jesus is growing it is not yet time for him to go to the cross (see 9:51.)

Big Idea

Jesus came to bring spiritual salvation but just because your familiar with Jesus doesn't mean you will see that you need Jesus.

Suggested Applications

- **Do you see yourself as Jesus sees you?**
 - This question is not just for those who are not yet Christians, it is for Christians too. We need to realise and never lose sight of the fact that without Jesus we are spiritually poor, blind, oppressed and imprisoned. It's only as we truly believe this that we will see our deep and humbling need for Jesus!
- **Don't be surprised when people don't respond to Jesus the way you expect them to.**
 - These people grew up with Jesus. They knew him better than any of the other towns he visited and yet they were the first people who tried to kill him. Here is a classic example of the people who you'd expect to receive Jesus actually rejecting Jesus. The OT stories show us that very often whilst those who are closest to Jesus reject him, those who are far off will receive him. This should encourage us and help us set biblical expectations as we share Jesus with people.
 - They show us that you can be impressed by Jesus and say nice things about him and yet be totally unmoved by him and reject him because you refuse to recognise that you're spiritually blind and helpless without him.
- **Should Christians and Churches focus on people's material and physical needs or their spiritual needs? Which should be the priority? Are they mutually exclusive?**
 - We have seen that Jesus' primary concern was people's spiritual blindness, poverty and imprisonment and so this should be our primary concern too. Yet as we read the rest of Luke's gospel we see that Jesus is not indifferent to people's physical needs.
 - Whilst it would be wrong for Christians to ignore the physical and material needs around us we must make sure that we follow Jesus by keeping people's spiritual needs as our main concern.

- It would be good for the group to discuss what this will look like in practice.

Suggested Bible Study

As with the last study it would be really good to give people time to talk about what they have been reading in Luke's gospel. Give people the opportunity to ask questions and to share encouragements and challenges.

As you study 4:14-30 you might want to just use the 6 questions on the bookmark or you might like to supplement those questions with some of your own. Alternatively you might like to use the following questions.

Starter Question

1. What sort of people do we tend to think are the most likely to become Christians?

The big shock in this passage is that it is Jesus' hometown who are amongst the first to reject him and want to kill him. You could use a question like this to get the group thinking about our expectations and people's reactions to Jesus.

(Alternatively you might like to come up with an activity or a game to do with sight and seeing things clearly as this is another important theme in the passage. If I was doing this with children I might play a game like pin the tail on the donkey or something else to do with seeing.)

Digging into the Passage

2. From v14-21 what did Jesus come to do?

In this question we want people to see that Jesus came to preach and teach (spot how many times words like "teaching" or "proclaim" come up.) We also want people to see that Jesus has come to bring release, sight and freedom. This might open up a discussion about whether these verses are referring to literal poverty etc or spiritual. Feel free to address these questions at this point or to save them until later.

3. In v22-30 how did the people respond to Jesus?

Hopefully people will pick up the contrasting reaction of v22 as well as the desire for a miracle in v23 and then the murderous fury of v28-29.

4. Why do you think these people were so furious with Jesus?

This question flows on from the last question because we need to tease out why it is that the people react the way we do. If we miss this then our application will probably miss the mark later on. We need to see that the people of Nazareth are reacting just like the people of Israel in Elijah and Elisha's day. We also need to see that on the surface they are furious with Jesus because in v24-27 he's talking about his blessings going to Gentiles. The crucial thing that we need to see is that ultimately the reason these people reject Jesus is because they are spiritually poor, blind and imprisoned and yet they refuse to recognise this. This is the big thing that you need to help your group to see. It's not enough for us to simply say that "familiarity breeds contempt." That is only part of the answer, the deeper answer is that spiritual blindness and poverty breeds hatred and rejection of Jesus and that's the natural condition of all our hearts.

5. Does the reaction of these people surprise you or not? Why?

There is obviously no right or wrong answer to this question as it is a matter of opinion. Many of us would be shocked because we would expect Jesus' hometown to be the first to believe in him and yet they are not. Again this question helps to probe the bigger question of why do people reject Jesus. Nazareth shows us that it is not for a lack of evidence, the problem is our hearts.

Applying the Passage

6. What has this passage taught us about ourselves? Why is this important?

Hopefully we see ourselves as poor, blind and imprisoned people who need Jesus. This is vital because if we don't see this or if we lose sight of it then we'll be offended by Jesus and walk away from him.

7. How does this passage shape our expectations as we share Jesus with people?

Don't be surprised if religious people or people who are familiar with Jesus are the ones who reject him. Similarly don't be surprised if the people who do accept Jesus are the ones you'd least expect. Ultimately it boils down to whether we see ourselves as people who desperately need Jesus. This question might prompt lots of other questions or it might prompt people to share their own experience in this area - this may be worth encouraging.

8. Should Christians focus on people's physical and material needs or just their spiritual needs? What should our priority be? Why? What do you think this should look like in practise?

You probably don't want to ask all these questions at once but you can use some or all of them to discuss the whole area of social-action and evangelism. Try and let what we have learnt from the passage shape our discussion. This is the sort of topic which can be a real hobby horse for some people (on both sides of the argument) but this is a Bible study and not a hobby horse riding club so let's try and be led by the passage. Try as well to talk practically about what we should be doing or not doing rather than just talking in vague ideas and concepts because we want to be doers of the word and not just hearers and talkers.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 7:36-50

Context

- *Salvation in ch7-8*
 - Remember how Luke has told us that his gospel is an orderly account. This means Luke has carefully ordered his material. He has not just thrown the different sections together randomly.
 - Chapters 7-8 form a section (notice how 7:1 ends a section of Jesus teaching and see how in 9:1 he commissions the twelve for ministry.) in ch7-8 the big theme is salvation. As you can see below the section begins and ends with salvation miracles (7:1-17 and 8:22-56). There are then two sections where we see the different responses to Jesus and the salvation he brings (7:18-35 and 8:1-21.) The in the middle of the section we get our passage which shows us what is at the very heart of salvation (7:36-50).
 - **Salvation Miracles (7:1-17)**
 - **Healing of the centurion's servant (7:1-10)**
 - **Raising the widow's son (7:11-17)**
 - **Response to Jesus and Salvation (7:18-35)**
 - **Response of John the Baptist (7:18-23)**
 - **Response of Tax Collectors, Pharisees and Experts of the Law (7:24-35)**
 - **Heart of Salvation - Simon and the Sinful Woman (7:36-50)**
 - **Response to Jesus and Salvation (8:1-21)**
 - **Parable of the Sower and other response parables (8:1-18)**
 - **Jesus' real family are those who hear and act upon God's word (8:19-21)**
 - **Salvation Miracles (8:22-56)**
 - **Jesus calms a storm (8:22-25)**
 - **Jesus drives out the demons (8:26-39)**
 - **Jesus raises a dead girl and heals the sick woman (8:40-56)**
- Our passage shows us that salvation is by faith alone (7:50). It shows us that salvation is about having our sins and guilt forgiven by Jesus (7:48-49). It shows us that salvation is by grace alone (7:41-42). It also shows us that our response to Jesus depends on whether we really see how sinful we are and how in need of forgiveness we are (7:41-43.)
- This means that our passage is something of a key that unlocks the rest of chs7-8.
- *The Pharisees in Luke*
 - We can sometimes think of the Pharisees as a pantomime villain who are booed the minute they come on stage. We need to remember that in the 1st century they were the most upstanding, well-respected people in society. They were zealous role-models in society who everyone looked up to. This makes their increasingly hostile response to Jesus even more shocking.

- As we read our passage and meet Simon the Pharisee (notice how many times Luke tells us that he is a pharisee) we need to remember that Jesus and the Pharisees have previous. In 5:21 the Pharisees reacted to Jesus' claim to forgive sins (which comes up again in our passage) by accusing him of blasphemy. In 5:30 they are shocked that he eats and drinks with sinners (again look at Simon's response to Jesus in 7:39). Then when Jesus heals a man on the sabbath they are furious (6:11) and begin to discuss what they might do to Jesus. Then in 7:30 we are told that the Pharisees rejected God's purposes for them.
- The picture we have therefore is that the Pharisees are becoming increasingly hostile to Jesus. Increasingly they are the example of how not to respond to Jesus.
- *Historical Social Etiquette*
 - The social etiquette at dinner parties like this one was that you would wash your guests feet (which would be very dirty from walking bare foot or in open sandals. You would then greet your guests with a kiss on either cheek and for a special guest such as a Jesus you would pour oil on their head.
 - Simon has done none of those things and yet the woman lavishly does all of these things. Simon's refusal to follow the social etiquette of the day shows that he really doesn't love Jesus and Jesus' parable explains that this is because Simon doesn't believe that he really needs forgiving (in contrast to the woman.) Simon is therefore sadly responding like a typical pharisee - he really is "one of the Pharisees" (7:36.)

Structure

- Structurally this is one unit but for the sake of commenting I will divide it up into sub-sections. The key to the passage is the parable Jesus tells in v41-42. The parable is clearly about Simon and the Sinful Woman and so we must let Jesus' parable interpret and shape how we read the rest of the passage. If we stick with the parable we will stick with Jesus.
- **v36-38 - The Setting and the Characters**
 - **"A woman who lived a sinful life"** - When people are identified as sinners in the gospels it is usually telling us that they were notorious sinners, e.g. 5:30. By telling us that this woman lived a sinful life Luke isn't trying to tell us that Simon and everyone else at the meal were perfect (Jesus makes this clear in 7:41.) Instead Luke is telling us that in society's opinion this woman was a big sinner, everyone knew about her and her lifestyle.
 - **Contrasting Characters** - In contrast to this sinful woman we have Simon the Pharisee. In 1st century Jewish society you couldn't get two more different people. (See the context for more on Pharisees.)
- **v39-43 - Jesus's Parable**
 - **"He said to himself"** - notice that v39 is in Simon's head and yet Jesus knows what he is thinking and answers him (v40.) This has strong similarities with 5:21-22. Jesus' acceptance of this woman and her actions is proof for Simon that Jesus is not really a prophet. In Simon's mind a true prophet would have nothing to do with such a person.
 - **Jesus' Parable** - As previously mentioned this is the key to the passage and understanding why Simon and the woman respond as they do. Here are a few key details to notice;
 - The two people clearly represent Simon and the woman.

- Both people have a debt that they cannot pay off (v42). In this respect the differing amounts are irrelevant. They are both powerless to pay off their debt. They are both reliant on the money-lender to have mercy on them. The implication is that Simon doesn't think he needs Jesus' grace.
 - Notice the order in the parable. The forgiveness of their debt comes before their love for the money-lender. They don't love the money lender and then have their debt forgiven. This is crucial when we come to the woman being forgiven by Jesus v47-48. At first glance it could seem like the woman does a loving thing for Jesus and then he forgives her. But both the parable and v47 clearly show us that her loving action is a response to Jesus' gracious forgiveness. The order is Jesus' Gracious Forgiveness --> The Woman's Loving Response. It's not the other way around! If we needed any more proof, Jesus' words in v50 make it clear. Jesus tells her that it's her faith that has saved her, not her love or her deeds.
- **V44-47 - the Response of Simon and the Woman to Jesus**
 - Having heard Jesus' parable we can now understand why the two people respond the way that they do.
 - Notice in v44 how Jesus turns towards the woman but continues to speak to Simon. Jesus is making a positive example of this woman and her faith and love.
 - In light of the parable we see that Simon has treated Jesus so shamefully (remember the 1st century custom) because he doesn't really love Jesus. The reason he doesn't love Jesus is that he doesn't see how sinful he really is and therefore how big his spiritual debt is and how much he needs Jesus' grace and forgiveness.
 - In contrast the woman is acutely aware of how sinful she is and so she loves Jesus so extravagantly because he has forgiven her sin. Here is the big point of the passage and a rich seam of application for us. How much we love Jesus is determined by how sinful we think we are. If we don't think we have a spiritual debt (or only a small one) then like Simon we won't really love Jesus. But the more we recognise how huge and unpayable our spiritual debt is then the more, like the woman, we will extravagantly love Jesus. Now that's a challenging thought isn't it?
- **V48-50 - Jesus Speaks to the Woman**
 - **"Who is this who even forgives sins?"** - we have already heard people asking this question back in 5:21 (again notice the repeated parallels between the two passages.) constantly through Luke we are being confronted with the question of who is Jesus? We are also being repeatedly shown that Jesus is the Son of God!
 - **What is Salvation?** - Remember that Salvation is a key them in ch7-8. This passage at the heart of the section teaches us some key things about salvation.
 - Salvation is about having your sins forgiven - just count how many times the word/ forgive/ forgiven/ forgives comes up in this passage and specifically these last few verses.
 - Salvation is by Faith alone (v50) - The temptation is to think that it's the woman's love and good deeds towards Jesus that have saved her but Jesus is clear it is her faith alone that has saved her. We are not told but this seems to suggest that the woman had already encountered Jesus, heard his teaching and responded in faith (possibly earlier in ch7.)
 - Salvation is about peace - we can easily miss this comment in v50 but it is important. This woman is now at peace with God because her sins have been forgiven (see 2:14.) She is now in the right with God and enjoying his peace.

Tricky Bits

- ***Has Simon been forgiven only a little? (v47) What does Jesus mean?***
 - Let's be clear on the big point that Jesus is making in v47. The reason Simon doesn't love Jesus and has treated him so badly is because Simon doesn't think he really needs forgiving by Jesus. He thinks his spiritual debt is small. Unlike the woman he doesn't recognise that he can't pay off his debt. As a result, unlike the woman, he doesn't think that he really needs Jesus and the forgiveness that Jesus offers. As a result he doesn't love Jesus as much as the woman.
 - The way that the passage finishes leaves us wondering whether Simon actually became a Christian or not. In some ways the passage ends on a cliffhanger for both Simon and ourselves. Will Simon continue to not see how sinful he is and how much he needs Jesus? Or will he recognise that he can't pay off his debt and put his faith in Jesus like the woman? Similarly what about us? Will we be like Simon and deep down think that we're not very sinful and that we don't need Jesus to wipe out our debt? Or will we humbly recognise how sinful we are and how desperately we need Jesus? Only those who recognise how hopeless they are without Jesus will then love him with the sort of extravagant love that the woman has.

Big Idea

The more we see how big our sin is, the more we will love Jesus and his grace to us!

Suggested Areas of Application

- This passage has much to say about several groups of people;
 - Non-Christians who don't care about Jesus
 - Many of us have friends and family who seem completely uninterested in Jesus. Perhaps we've shared the gospel with them over years, maybe they even come to church regularly and yet they don't seem at all interested in Jesus. Inevitably we find ourselves asking, "why?"
 - This passage shows us that the reason people don't love Jesus or think they need Jesus is because they don't see how sinful they are. If we think that we have a small (or even nonexistent) spiritual debt then we won't think we need Jesus.
 - If our friends and neighbours are going to come to really love Jesus then we need to pray that they would be gripped with a sense of how big their debt is and how helpless they are to pay it off. Only then will they come to Jesus in faith and love him like this woman does.
 - The other group of people who this passage particularly speaks to is those of us who are loveless Christians.
 - Perhaps you have been a Christian for years. Perhaps when you think back you can remember how passionately you loved Jesus when you started out as a Christian. Perhaps if you're honest your love for Jesus has grown cold over the years. Perhaps when you remember back to how much you used to love Jesus you feel ashamed and embarrassed that you don't love him like that any more. Perhaps like the church at Ephesus you are doing lots of things for Jesus but if you are honest you have lost your first love (Revelation 2:4.)
 - If that is you then you are not alone, but what do you need to do? This passage shows us that if our love for Jesus has cooled it is probably because we have lost

sight of how sinful we are. If our love for Jesus has cooled it is probably because deep down (like Simon) we think that if we have a spiritual debt then we will be able to pay it off ourselves without Jesus.

- This passage would show us that the way to grow in our love for Jesus is to grow in our awareness of our sin. The more we see how sinful we are, the more we will love Jesus and his grace to us.
- This means that as we pray in this passage we should pray two similar prayers;
 - Firstly for those we know who are not Christians we should pray that God's Spirit would convict them of their sinfulness and then show them the extravagant grace and forgiveness that is only found in Jesus.
 - Secondly for those of us who are Christians whose love for Jesus has cooled we should pray that God would remind us of how sinful we are. We should pray that we would be confronted with how great the debt we owe so that we would love and cherish the grace and forgiveness that are ours in Jesus.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question or Activity

1. Why do you think so many people are so uninterested in Jesus?

This question would help to get the group to think about those who, like Simon, don't love Jesus. Lots of upright, "good" people like Simon are so uninterested in Jesus, but why? We might be able to think of lots of different reasons for this but ultimately Jesus shows us in this passage that the big reason people aren't interested in him is because they don't think they need him because they don't think they are really sinful.

Alternatively you might want to start by thinking about why Christians can grow cold in their love for Jesus. Alternatively you might want to do something around the idea of a party being gatecrashed and asking the group how they would have felt.

Digging into the Passage

2. Who are the main characters in is scene? What are we told about them?

This question is designed as a straight forward observation question. It's designed to get people looking down at the passage and engaging with the detail. If you have a big group you might want to split the group into smaller groups for this question and then feed back.

3. How do you think Simon felt when this woman gatecrashed his party?

We are dealing with narrative and so it is important for us to engage with the narrative and not just focus on the teaching. In some ways there are no wrong answers to this question. It should give people the chance to imagine what it was like for Simon and to get them into his shoes. This is important because as Christians the danger is that we can be just like Simon and not really love Jesus as much as we should.

4. What is the big thing that Jesus teaches Simon and us in v41-42?

Remember that this parable is the key to understanding the whole passage so make sure that you're group can clearly see what Jesus is teaching before you move on. Jesus is saying that both Simon and the woman have a debt that they cannot pay. The woman loves Jesus extravagantly like this because she realises how extravagantly gracious Jesus has been to her. Simon treats Jesus the way he does because Simon doesn't really love

Jesus. And the reason Simon doesn't really love Jesus is because he doesn't think he really needs Jesus and the forgiveness Jesus offers.

5. Can you think of a modern retelling of this parable?

This is an optional question that might help the group to get the big point of the passage. A modern version of this parable might involve two students who both had student loans that they couldn't pay off. One owed x and one owed y, but then a new generous chancellor of the exchequer came to power and cancelled all student loans - which student will love him more?

6. Why did the woman treat Jesus the way she did?

The woman treats Jesus this way because she has already been forgiven by Jesus. It's crucial that the group see this. She isn't forgiven because of what she does. She's put her trust in Jesus, then she's been forgiven and then as a result she has responded with such extravagant love. The parable and v47 make this clear.

7. Why did Simon treat Jesus the way he did? What has Simon not realised about himself?

Simon refuses to recognise that he has a debt that he can't pay off. As a result he doesn't really value and love Jesus because he doesn't think he really needs Jesus. His lack of love and concern for Jesus is seen by how he has not done the social norm of washing Jesus' feet, anointing his head and kissing him.

Applying the Passage

8. At the moment does your response to Jesus look more like the woman's or more like Simon's? What does that tell you about yourself?

I know this is a very personal question but it's the obvious question to ask as we study this passage. Who do we look like? As Christians we all want to love Jesus extravagantly like the woman and perhaps at points in the past that was what we were like. But I suspect that most of us look like Simon. Like Simon most of us, when it comes to Jesus, love little because we have been forgiven little. Does BEC look like a group of Simons who don't really love Jesus? Or are we a church of sinful women (and men) who are known for our extravagant love for Jesus?

9. All Christians have points when our love for Jesus cools. What will reignite our love for Jesus and keep us loving Jesus like this woman?

This passage shows us the big link between our love for Jesus and our view of ourselves. If my love for Jesus has cooled then it's probably because I've forgotten what I'm really like. I've forgotten that I'm a massive sinner with a huge spiritual debt that I could never pay off. The way to reignite my love for Jesus and keep it burning is to be constantly reminding myself of what I'm like without Jesus! Perhaps this question (or one like it) will help open up an honest conversation about how our love for Jesus does go cold at times. You might want to remind people of the church at Ephesus that we studied last term in Revelation 2 where they had lost their first love. Perhaps you could talk about why we might have lost our first love?

10. Lots of people today are like Simon. They basically ignore him and have no time for him. How does this passage help us to understand why they don't care about Jesus? What needs to happen if they are going to come to love Jesus?

This question is designed to bring us full circle and back to where we started the study. There may be lots of surface reasons why people don't love Jesus but the bigger deeper reason is that they don't think they need him. And the reason they don't think they need Jesus is because they don't think they are sinful and so they don't need Jesus' forgiveness. This passage shows us that we need to be prepared to talk about sin with people and we need to pray that God's Spirit would convict them of their sin in the way this woman was convicted (John 16:8-11.)

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 9:22-26

On the original plan I suggested that you also look at 9:57-62 in this study. On reflection I think it would probably be best to just focus on 9:22-26 and work hard at understanding and applying this one passage rather than juggling with two.

Context

- *Peter's Confession of Jesus as the Messiah*
 - Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah and this is a turning point in Luke's gospel. The question of Jesus' identity has been a major theme through the first part of the gospel. Now that Jesus has been identified as the Messiah the focus will shift onto what sort of Messiah he is and what it will mean to follow this Messiah.
- *The Cost of Following Jesus*
 - From 9:51-19:48 Jesus and his followers will travel to Jerusalem and several themes that appear in this passage will be developed on the journey. These include the rejection of Jesus (9:22; 13:31-35 and 18:31-33) and the cost of following Jesus (9:23-26; 9:57-62 and 14:25-34.)

Structure

- **v22 - As the Messiah Jesus *must* suffer, be killed and raised**
 - **What sort of Messiah is Jesus?**
 - Peter has just identified Jesus as the Messiah only for Jesus to curiously warn the disciples not to share this new insight (v21.) the reason that Jesus doesn't yet want them to tell people that he is the Messiah is that the disciples and the rest of the people do not yet understand what sort of a Messiah Jesus is.
 - The disciples thought that the coming of the Messiah would mean instant glory. Yet Jesus needs to show them that the glory of the Messiah comes only through suffering! Indeed he will repeatedly predict his suffering in the rest of Luke's gospel and yet the disciples will not understand (9:44; 12:50, 13:31-33, 17/25, 18:31-34.)
 - Jesus is the Messiah but he is not what people are expecting. As Jesus travels to Jerusalem he will repeatedly warn his disciples that the road to glory goes through the cross. There is no other way!
 - **Must**
 - Jesus repeats this little word three times in this short passage (2x v22 and v23.)
 - Jesus is stressing that the way to glory is through suffering and death. There is no other way for him or for his followers.
 - The word "must" also reminds us that what is going to happen to Jesus is all part of God's plan. Jesus must suffer, be rejected and die because this what God had always said would happen (Luke 24:46, Isaiah 52:13-53:12.) God has said this will happen so it must happen. As we see that Jesus' suffering and death are actually part of God's eternal plan then this greatly reassures us that God is still in control even as his Son is rejected and killed by those he came to save. God is as in control of events when Jesus is being killed as he is when he is raising Jesus from the dead. The suffering and death of Christ is the ultimate example of

God's sovereignty and his love. At the cross of Christ we see that God really does work all things for the good of those who love him, and that what people intended for evil, God intended for good and the saving of many lives.

- **v23-26 - Following Jesus will involve suffering for Jesus... But whatever the cost it's worth it!**

- **The logic of what Jesus' saying**

- As we prepare Bible studies it is always good to read the passage in several translations because there will be times when the NIV leaves out some joining words (e.g. And, but, for etc) for the sake of making the passage easier to read.
- In this passage in the original Greek v24, 25 and 26 all begin with the word "For/because". The NIV includes the first of these but then leaves out the other two. I've included the ESV below so that you can see the logical flow of the passage.
- The big point Jesus is making about discipleship comes in v23. Then in v24 he gives his reason "For..." V25 then gives the reason for v24, and then v26 gives the reason for v25. The ESV helps us to see the logic of what Jesus is saying and helps us to see how each of the verses is closely tied to the others.

BIG POINT 23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

24 **For** whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

25 **For** what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

26 **For** whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

- **Whoever**

- As British Christians reading these verses we can be tempted to think that they don't really apply to us. It is very unlikely that we will literally be crucified for our faith in the way that some of our brothers and sisters in the first century or in Iraq and Syria have experienced. Yet Jesus repeatedly says "Whoever" wants to follow him will suffer and find it costly (see v23, 2x in v24 and again in v26.) These words are for us as much as they are for the persecuted parts of the church.

- **Deny themselves**

- To be a disciple of Jesus is to be someone who daily says "no" to our own agenda and "yes" to Jesus' agenda. To be a disciple is to put our longings and desires second to Jesus' desires and plans.
- This is not something we do once at the beginning of the Christian life. Instead it is a daily decision to lay aside our desires, plans and longings and to follow the path and priorities that God lays out.

- **Take up their cross**

- We have domesticated this phrase so that we can refer to putting up with an awkward relative as bearing your cross. In its original context this was a shocking phrase that has got nothing to do with your mother-in-law! To take up your cross in the first century was to go to your death!
- To carry your cross for Jesus is to identify with his rejection. When someone took up their cross their life was over. Similarly for the Christian to deny themselves and take up their cross they are saying that their life as they knew it is over.
- As Christians we are to daily die to self and live for Christ. This will not be easy and will bring with it something of the rejection and scorn that Jesus suffered. While we don't face martyrdom in this country we must not lose sight of the radical and costly nature of Jesus' call to follow him.

- **Daily**

- As mentioned above, the decision to follow Jesus isn't a one off decision. Instead Jesus is saying that every day we must make the costly decision to follow him.

- **Follow me**

- It's important to remember the context. Jesus is about to go to Jerusalem. He is about to set out on his journey to the cross. Jesus' call to follow him was a call to join him in being rejected, suffering and even possibly dying because of their association with him. Although our context is different we need to see that following Jesus is still costly and will bring the hostility and rejection of the world. To follow Jesus will mean suffering for Jesus whether we live in Baghdad or Bessacarr.

- **Losing your life to save it (v24-25)**

- Jesus' words are really counter-intuitive and yet v25 and v26 show why they are true. If we want to control our lives then we will actually lose them because we won't be submitting to God's way.
- It's important to recognise the time element of these verses. If I want to save my life NOW through seeking the world's acceptance then I will lose my life THEN, when Christ returns (v26).
- To distance ourselves from Jesus now might bring an easy ride now but will ultimately bring disaster upon us.
- Notice too that Jesus is not just talking about losing our life. He's talking about losing our life FOR HIM. In this way we see that this verses ties in with the idea of denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Jesus in the previous verse.
- By distancing ourselves from Jesus we may gain the world and its acceptance yet we will lose all that really matters and lasts. The devil's lie is to make us think that it is only following Jesus that is costly. The truth is that both following Jesus and not following Jesus are costly. Following Jesus brings a temporary cost now, but not following Jesus will bring an eternal cost when Jesus returns. Like a good financial advisor Jesus is honestly placing the full costs of our decision before us.

- **Ashamed**

- To take up our cross and follow Jesus will mean publicly confessing Jesus as our Lord and his word as ruling our lives. This will bring ridicule and rejection from the world and so Jesus is realistic that we will all be tempted to feel ashamed of Jesus and distance ourselves from him.

- Jesus warns us that ultimately we will get what we choose. If we choose to distance ourselves from Jesus now then he will distance himself from us when he returns.
- Notice too that you can have Jesus without also accepting his word. Many today want Jesus but they don't want his word. In the same sex marriage debate many people claim to be Christians whilst being ashamed of Jesus' words and distancing themselves from what the Bible teaches. This verse warns us that Jesus and his words are inseparable. If we are ashamed of Jesus' words then we are ashamed of him.

Tricky Bits

• *What is Jesus speaking about in v27?*

- Although we are just focusing on v22-26 your group might want to study the surrounding verses and look at v21-22 and v27. V27 is the sort of verse where we can easily get bogged down with the question of what Jesus means by the Kingdom of God in this verse.
- Jesus cannot be referring to his coming again in glory because otherwise some of the disciples would still be alive today which obviously is not the case.
- The next possible explanation is that Jesus is referring to Pentecost and the giving of the Spirit when he speaks of the Kingdom of God in this verse. This is certainly a possibility and should not be discounted (see Acts 1:4, 1:6 for references to Kingdom in the context of Pentecost.)
- The third possible explanation is that Jesus is referring to his transfiguration which some of the disciples will witness in the next verses. On balance I would lean towards this explanation because of the time reference that Luke includes in 9:28. That time reference shows us that Luke is linking what he has just said about the kingdom in v27 with what is about to happen in v28-36.
- Whichever option you go with don't let the group get bogged down in speculating. The big application of the passage for us is found in v23-26 so keep this as your focus.

Big Idea

- **Following Jesus is costly but worth it!**

Suggested Applications

- For many of us this is a very familiar passage and so it can be very easy to go through the motions and trot out all the right answers when studying this passage. The key to having a good study of this passage is to get the group to really apply this passage personally and honestly rather than just generally. This will only happen if you, as the leader, have personally applied the passage for yourself first. Before you write your study consider these questions for yourself...
 - **What are your expectations as you follow Jesus?** Do you secretly expect it to be easy? Have there been times recently where you have been confronted afresh with the cost of Jesus? If following Jesus doesn't feel costly then what does that say about our discipleship?
 - **Where do you find it hardest to deny yourself and follow Jesus?** Be as specific as possible.

- **When do you feel ashamed of Jesus and his teaching?** Again be as specific as possible.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question

11. How did you become a Christian and what did you expect it was going to be like?

You could split the group into smaller groups or pairs to discuss this question. If not everyone in your group is a question then you may want to discuss expectations as one big group so as to avoid making anyone uncomfortable or embarrassed.)

Digging into the Passage

12. Jesus uses the word "must" three times in this passage. What does Jesus insist must happen to him and his followers?

Use this question to get the group into the passage and looking at the detail. Many of us know this passage off by heart and so the danger is that we won't really engage with the details of the text. Help the group to see the big things that Jesus is saying about himself as the messiah and about what it will be like following him.

13. Why do you think that Jesus must be rejected, suffer, die and rise?

This isn't in the passage and so it will require the group to think for themselves. Jesus must suffer because this is part of God's eternal plan of salvation. When we see this it is greatly encouraging because it shows us that God is still sovereign even at the cross. You might want to spend some time dwelling on this with your group and helping the, to take the comfort and applications from this before you progress with the rest of the study.

14. As Christians, why must we daily deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow Jesus? (V23-26)

In this question we want to get into Jesus' logic in v23-26. Hopefully the group should pick up the "For" at the beginning of v24 which helps us to see that the reason we are to deny ourselves and follow Jesus is because if we don't then we will actually lose our lives. The way of the cross is ultimately the way of life. As you study these verses you just want to keep asking "Why?" Why should we do v23? Why is v24 true? Why is v25? The aim is to help the group dig down through the verses and see the logic and power of what Jesus is saying.

Applying the Passage

15. As Christians in 21st century Britain we're unlikely to be crucified for our faith. What do you think v23 should look like in our lives?

The danger at this point is that we apply the passage to the persecuted church and avoid applying it to ourselves. Don't let the group get apply the passage to other people before they have applied it to themselves. Encourage the group to be as concrete and specific as possible rather than just giving general answers. As the group leader be prepared to give specific concrete examples of your own.

16. Where do we find it hardest to deny ourselves and follow Jesus?

Again encourage the group to be as specific as possible. Be prepared to lead and give examples from your own life or to offer suggestions to help get the group talking honestly.

If we never find it costly or difficult to follow Jesus then what does that say about our discipleship? You may want to throw that question in if the group are struggling to think of times when it's hard to follow Jesus.

17. In what situations are we tempted to feel ashamed of Jesus and his teaching?

Again let's be specific rather than just general. If the application of this passage remains general then we have missed an opportunity. Jesus repeatedly says "whoever..." so that means that all of us will find it hard and costly to follow Jesus. Similarly we will all have times when we are embarrassed to follow Jesus. By sharing these things it will draw us closer together as a group and encourage one another.

18. How does this passage encourage us when we are finding it costly to follow Jesus?

Make sure that the group doesn't miss the punchline of what Jesus is saying! Yes following Jesus will be costly but it's worth it! It will ultimately be far more costly not to follow Jesus. If we stick with Jesus and unashamedly follow him then he will not be ashamed to stand with us and claim us as his own when he returns! What a gloriously encouraging thought on which to end the study.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 11:1-13

Again I have shortened the passage to study. Originally we were going to include the incident with Mary and Martha but as we had a sermon on this passage at the start of the term I think the best use of your time would be to focus on 11:1-13. As you will see from the Context the end of ch10 and the beginning of ch11 are linked by the theme of discipleship.

Context

- Being a Disciple of Jesus in Luke 10-11
 - The theme of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus holds 10:25-11:13 together.
 - In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37) Jesus taught that to be a disciple is to be someone who wholeheartedly loves their neighbour.
 - Then in the incident with Mary and Martha (10:38-42) Jesus showed that listening to Jesus should be the priority of his disciples. Indeed listening to Jesus is even more important than practically serving Jesus.
 - Now in 11:1-13 we see that Jesus' disciples are to be persistently and shamelessly dependent on God as their Heavenly Father.

Structure

- **v1-4 What should we pray for?**
 - **"Hallowed be your name..."**
 - To pray that God's name would be hallowed is to pray that it would be respected/ considered holy. We are asking that his name and therefore also his character would be worshipped and honoured. We are praying that people would see and acknowledge God's greatness, glory and perfection.
 - Practically God's name will be hallowed in how we speak and behave. This prayer is not just a prayer for God's name to be hallowed in society and in the media. It is also a prayer that God's name would be hallowed by his people both individually and corporately.
 - **"Your kingdom come..."**
 - Living between Christ's ascension and coming again we live in the "now but not yet." God's kingdom has come with Christ's first coming and his death and resurrection, but it has not yet come in all its fullness. This will only happen when Christ comes again and sin and evil are completely destroyed and the rule of Christ and righteousness are perfectly established and unopposed. To pray for God's kingdom to come is therefore to pray for Christ's return. It's to pray for the end of the world and for us as Christians to be truly at home.
 - To pray for God's kingdom to come is also to pray for evangelism. The Kingdom of God is not a political or geographical kingdom but rather it is within us (Luke 17:21). God's kingdom is established in us as we bow the knee to Christ and turn to him in repentance, faith and submission as our King and Saviour. This means that to pray for God's kingdom to grow is to pray for more people to submit to Jesus as their king.
 - To pray for God's kingdom to grow is also to pray for the growth of his kingdom in our own lives. To pray for God's kingdom to come is to pray that we would submit more and more of our lives to the kingship of King Jesus.
- **"Daily bread..."**

- In our context this feels like an odd thing to pray for because Asda is open 24/7 and food is always available. Yet to pray this part of the prayer is to recognise our complete and utter dependence upon God to provide for us each and every day.
- It strikes me that this is possibly one of the hardest things for comfortable western Christians like ourselves to pray for. We are so comfortable that we can so easily forget that we depend on God for everything, without him we would have nothing. Perhaps as we daily ask God to give us what we need we should also pray that he would daily keep us humble and dependent upon him.
- **"Forgive us our sins..."**
 - Not only are we dependent upon God for provision, we are also dependent upon him for forgiveness. To pray for forgiveness is to recognise our guilt before God but it is also to confess our faith in Christ. Without Christ this is a hopeless prayer and yet because of his atoning sacrifice we can pray this prayer with confidence because we know that Christ bore the penalty for our sin on the cross and so forgiveness is available to us.
 - See the **Tricky Bits** for further help on understanding this verse.
- **"Lead us not into temptation"**
 - Here again we are expressing our dependence on God to protect us from all sorts of temptations and trials (the word temptation can also refer to a trial.) we are asking God to lead us in paths of righteousness because we recognise that if we were left on our own then we would naturally succumb to temptation and follow the paths of sin and destruction.
- **The Summary of the Shape of this Prayer**
 - This prayer shows us our complete and utter daily dependence upon God for everything. Every day we need him to provide for us both physically and spiritually.
 - In giving us this prayer Jesus is showing us the shape that our prayers should take. In telling us to pray this prayer Jesus isn't instructing us to pray this prayer word for word in this form every day. Instead he is showing us that our prayers are to be shaped by our complete dependence upon God for everything. Similarly our prayers are to reflect this concern for God's glory and his kingdom as well as our daily dependence upon him for food forgiveness and spiritual protection.
- **v5-10 - How should we pray?**
 - **"Because of your shameless audacity..."**
 - The point that Jesus is making with this parable is that if an irritated neighbour responds favourably to boldness then how much more will our loving Heavenly Father respond to our bold prayers?
 - Normally as British people we think that shameless audacity is a bad thing and we would shy away from this sort of behaviour but in this instance Jesus commends this sort of attitude in prayer.
 - Having shown us what to pray for (v1-4) Jesus now shows us how we are to pray for these things - we are to pray with shameless audacity for these things because God isn't an irritated neighbour, he's our loving Heavenly Father. Jesus is encouraging to pray boldly for these things rather than timidly.
 - Perhaps part of the reason that we often do not pray with such shameless audacity is because we are so aware of God's greatness that we do not feel we have the right to boldly ask him for such things. When we begin to think like this we are forgetting that our access to God in prayer as our Father comes through Jesus. We

are in Christ and clothed in his righteousness as we approach God in prayer. We are God's adopted children because of Christ and so we can and should pray with boldness for the things that Jesus has told us to pray for.

- **"Ask... Seek... Knock..."**
 - Having told us to pray with audacity and boldness Jesus now tells us to pray with persistence and confidence. In v9 the sense is that we are to keep on asking, seeking and knocking, in other words we are to be persistent in prayer. In v10 Jesus gives us the reason why we are to persistently and boldly. As we boldly and persistently pray for the things that Jesus has told us to pray for then he promises that God will answer our prayers.
- **v11-13 - Why should we pray like this?**
- **"... How much more will your Father in Heaven..."**
 - Having told us to pray with shameless audacity and boldness Jesus now gives us the big reason that we should pray like this - God is our Loving Heavenly Father!
 - God is the best possible father imaginable and so if an imperfect human Father knows how to give good things to his children when they ask, then how much more will our perfect Heavenly Father?
 - The fact that God is the Christian's Father is the foundation and fuel for our prayers. Notice how the Fatherhood of God bookends this passage in v2 and v13. God is not a disgruntled neighbour, nor is he an imperfect human Father, instead he is our perfect loving Heavenly Father who gave up his Son for us!
 - When, as Christians, we remember who God is to us it should spur us on to be daily praying with boldness and persistence for God's glory, kingdom, provision, forgiveness and protection!

Tricky Bits

- **Why is the Lord's Prayer different in Matthew 6?**
 - When you compare the two prayers there are some differences. There are several possible explanations for this;
 - Some suggest that either Matthew has expanded Jesus' prayer or Luke has shortened Jesus' prayer to fit their particular context.
 - A better explanation is that Matthew 6 and Luke 11 were two separate occasions when Jesus taught on prayer. If you look carefully at the context you will see that Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 occurs as part of a larger sermon on a mountain. In contrast Jesus' teaching in Luke 11 is in response to a question from one of his disciples who has seen Jesus pray. In both instances Jesus gave the same basic model of prayer but with slightly different wording. This helps us to see that what Jesus is teaching is a basic shape and structure to our prayers rather than a precise word for word prayer that we are to recite. He is teaching us the sorts of things we should be concerned about in our prayers rather than the exact wording of our prayers.
- **Is Jesus saying that we earn our forgiveness? (v4)**
 - Jesus is making the point that "a heart that asks for God's forgiveness must be a heart that has forgiven and continues to forgive" (Kent Hughes.) as we read the rest of the New Testament it is impossible to separate the forgiveness of God from our forgiveness of others (see Matthew 5:7, 6:14-15, 18:32-35, James 2:13.) With typical sharpness Spurgeon said, "Unless you have forgiven others, you read your own death- warrant when you repeat the Lord's Prayer."

- Jesus is showing us that true believers are those who have been forgiven by God and therefore respond by forgiving others. These words are therefore a warning to the person who calls themselves a Christian whilst stubbornly refusing to forgive.
- **Will we get whatever we want if we pray persistently? (v9)**
 - V9-10 need to be read in the context of the surrounding verses. Jesus has just told us what we should be praying for in v2-4 and the climax of this passage comes in v13 when he promises that the Father will give the Holy Spirit. This is the context in which we need to read the instructions and promises of v9-10.
- **Why does Jesus mention the Holy Spirit in v13?**
 - In some ways Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit at this point seems strange as the Holy Spirit has not been mentioned so far in this passage.
 - The first thing to notice is that the Holy Spirit is the very best gift that God as the perfect loving Father can give to his children.
 - Secondly the gift of the Holy Spirit is the big answer to our prayers in v2-4.
 - It's only with the Spirit's help and strength that we will be able to hallow God's name in all that we say and do.
 - Similarly God's kingdom comes and grows in us as we receive the Spirit and as the Spirit's control over more and more of our lives increases.
 - Again we will only have the power to forgive others who have sinned against us as the Spirit takes the love and forgiveness our hearts.
 - Finally, without the Spirit we are powerless to fight temptation but as we stand in the Spirit he empowers us to fight temptation and to live for Christ.

Big Idea

- Pray persistently and shamelessly for God's glory, kingdom, provision, forgiveness and protection because God's our good and generous Father.

Suggested Application

- **What sort of things do we spend most of our time praying for?**
 - This passage challenges us about what we pray for. Whilst we are to pray for daily provision we are also to pray for God's glory and the growth of his kingdom. We are also to seek his forgiveness and to pray that he would protect us from falling into temptation.
 - Do our prayers as individuals and as a group have this sort of shape? Do we spend more time praying about our immediate physical needs and not as much time praying about our spiritual needs?
 - If we don't spend much time praying for God's honour and glory and the expansion of his kingdom then what does this say about our concerns and priorities?
- **Pray persistently, expectantly and shamelessly?**
 - This passage challenges not just what we pray for but how we pray. I suspect that most of us wouldn't describe our praying as "shameless" or "audacious" and yet Jesus is commending this sort of praying.
 - Similarly how expectant are we as we pray? Jesus seems to be saying that when we expect God to answer our prayers you will see this in the boldness of our prayers.
- **Remember that God is Your Perfectly Good and Loving Heavenly Father**
 - This is the it thing for us to learn and take to heart from this passage. The idea of God as our Father bookends the passage (v2 and v13) and it is the foundation and fuel for

our prayers. The more we believe this the more we will pray and the bolder and more persistent our praying will be.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Questions

1. What do you find hardest about praying?

I'm assuming that all of us do find praying difficult in one way or another and so at the beginning of a study on prayer we might as well be honest with each other. To help get people talking you could split people into smaller groups to discuss this question. This way people won't have to share their struggles with the whole group.

Digging into v1-4

2. List the things that you as a group have prayed for so far this term?

The reason for doing this is that we want to compare the sorts of things that we pray for with the sorts of things that Jesus tells us to pray for. To help you do this you could have a large sheet of paper on which you write down all the different things. Make a note of whether you prayed for the same thing repeatedly because this will help us to see where we focus our prayers.

3. What sort of things does Jesus say that we should pray for?

As we have seen in the notes Jesus identifies 5 things that we are to pray for in v2-4. Having identified each of these you can then move on to consider what each of them means...

1. Take each of the five things in turn and talk about what you think each of them means.

We are not necessarily give the answer to this question in the passage so it will require people to think and bring in Biblical knowledge from elsewhere. The danger with such a familiar passage like this one is that we don't really dig below the surface and think about what these familiar words really mean. Don't let the group get away with using Christian jargon, encourage them to explain what these things (especially Hallowed) mean in simple every day terms. Encourage the group to be specific rather than just general.

Applying v1-4

4. Go back to the list of the things your group has prayed for. How does the shape of your prayers compare to the shape of Jesus' prayers?

*To help you do this you could use the table at the end of these notes and put your prayers under the different headings. This will help us to see whether we are praying for certain things more than others. If there are gaps in our prayers then you could talk about how to address. My guess is that as groups we're pretty good at praying for our physical needs (daily bread) and we're good at praying for the evangelistic activities of the church (your kingdom come) but we probably don't spend much time confessing our sins together and seeking God's forgiveness. At this point it is worth noticing that v2-4 are a corporate prayer, it's "give **us** each day **our** daily bread" not "give **me** each day **my** daily bread." Similarly it is "forgive **us our** sins" not forgive **me my** sins."*

Digging into v5-13

5. What sort of words would we use to describe our prayer lives?

Again this could be done in smaller groups or pairs so as to avoid embarrassment. By asking this question we can then compare how we currently pray with how Jesus tells us to pray. To help the group you could give them a range of different words to choose from. For example bold, timid, infrequent, regular, persistent etc.

6. How does Jesus say that we should pray?

Through the parable Jesus encourages us to pray with shameless audacity. If the grumpy neighbour responds to such boldness then how much more will our Heavenly Father. You could ask the group whether this shocks them because shameless audacity isn't the sort of thing that's encouraged in polite British society. Similarly you could get the group to talk about what they think shameless and audacious praying looks like.

7. Why does Jesus say that we should pray with boldness and shameless audacity?

The reason we can be so bold is because of who God is - he is our Heavenly Father. Jesus is using the "if... Then how much more..." of argument. If grumpy human neighbours respond to bold request then how much more will our loving Heavenly Father. Similarly if human father's give good gifts then how much more will our Heavenly Father...

Applying v5-13

8. How will this passage encourage you to be bold in your prayers?

I'm sure that we could all be more bold in our prayers but rather than finishing the study by dwelling on our struggles let's try to finish the study on a positive note by looking at the encouragements in this passage. The biggest of these is that God is our Heavenly Father who loves us and has given us every good gift and especially the Spirit. Why not finish the study by getting the group to dwell on the perfect loving generosity of our Heavenly Father because the more we see and relieve this then the more we will be spurred on to pray boldly to him.

Make sure you leave time at the end of the study to pray in what you have been learning from this passage! I'm sure you would agree that there would be something seriously wrong if we studied a passage on prayer and then didn't pray. Let's spend time praying about the sorts of things that Jesus has told us to pray for and let's spend some time praising our Heavenly Father for his perfect love and generosity to us!

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 14:1-24

Context

- **Luke 13-15**

- The big question in these chapters comes in 13:23 when someone asks Jesus, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" This is the big question that is being answered for us throughout these chapters and so this is the big issue in 14:1-24.
- We have already seen that the religious establishment of Israel refuse to come to Jesus (13:34-35.) Even though they have shared meals with Jesus on earth this will not be enough to get them into God's heavenly banquet (13:26-27.) We have seen that a great reversal is coming (13:30) so that many who would expect to be welcomed in will actually be shut out (13:25.) In contrast all sorts of unexpected people will come to God's heavenly banquet from all over the world (13:29.)
- In answer to the big question of 13:25 "Are only a few people going to be saved?" Jesus has given us the big answer that we need to "make every effort to enter through the narrow door (him)".
- In 14:1-24 Jesus is going to show us why the religious establishment of Israel, who think that they are guaranteed a place at God's banquet won't get in unless they humbly enter through the narrow door by coming to Jesus and accepting his invitation.

- **The Pharisees and Jesus**

- The Pharisees and the teachers of the law who represent the political and religious establishment have been growing increasingly hostile to Jesus (see 6:1-11 and 11:37-54.) They are out to get Jesus and they want to trap him. This helps us to see what Luke means when he says that Jesus "was being carefully watched" (14:1.)

- **The Feast in the Kingdom of God**

- This theme chs13-15 together and comes up repeatedly (13:29, 14:15, 14:24, 15:22-32.)
- The picture of a banquet is used throughout the Bible to speak of the blessings of the New Creation (see Isaiah 25:6, Luke 22:14-18, 30, Revelation 19:7-9.)

Structure

At first these verses can seem disconnected as Jesus addresses several themes. Before we dive into the detail of the verses we need to notice some of the connectors that link the material together.

- **The Setting** - 14:1-24 all takes place at the same dinner party.
- **Dinners and Banquets** - These verses take place at a dinner party and v7-11, v12-14 and v15-24 all draw on the imagery of the dinner party. Furthermore as we have already noticed the big question in these chapters is "Who will be at God's heavenly banquet?"
- **The Poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind** - Jesus refers to these groups of people in v13 and v21. Such people would have been marginalised in society and yet Jesus says that these are the people who are being invited to his banquet (v21) and they are the people who we are to welcome and show hospitality to (v13.)
- **Jesus exposes why the religious elite will not be at his banquet** - This is what links all the different sections of this passage together. The climax of the section comes in 14:23-24 when Jesus says that "not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet." As we read the parable we realise that he is referring to the religious elite at

the dinner party with him. These people assume that they will automatically be at God's dinner party (this is behind what is said in v15.) Throughout 14:1-24 Jesus is peeling back the skin and showing them what they are really like and why they therefore will not be at God's banquet unless they come to him.

Now that we have considered how the whole passage fits together we can now consider the individual sections in some more detail.

- **v1-6 - Jesus Exposes their Hypocritical Hostility to Him**

- **Sabbath** - The Sabbath was meant to be a day of rest that looked forward to ultimate rest in God's New Creation. Yet the religious people of Jesus' day had loaded the Sabbath with so many rules and regulations that they had made it burdensome rather than restful.
- **Hostility** - As we mentioned in the context the Pharisees are looking to trap Jesus which is why they are watching him so carefully (v1.) It is quite possible that they have brought along the man who is suffering so that Jesus will have to choose between healing the man and breaking their religious rules or keeping the religious rules but failing to show compassion. They are trying to trap Jesus and yet as normal he uses his questions to turn the tables on them.
- **Hypocrisy** - Jesus exposes their hypocrisy. The implication of v3-4 is that they do believe that it is unlawful to heal on the Sabbath because that would be work. Yet Jesus makes the point in v5-6 that if their child or even their cow were in danger or suffering in some way, then they would do something about. Jesus thus exposes their hypocrisy in opposing him.

- **v7-11 - Jesus Exposes their Arrogant Self-Promotion**

- **Parable** - In these verses Jesus is not just handing out some general advice on social etiquette. If you look closely at v7 you see that he is actually telling a parable and the punchline of the parable comes in v11. In v11 we see that Jesus is making a big point about God and not just offering some advice on social etiquette. Jesus is saying that a great Position Swap is coming and so instead of jockeying for position and status we must humble ourselves before God if we are going to come to Jesus, enter through the narrow door and be saved. The proud and self-promoting will not be at God's banquet because the only way to get into that banquet is by humbly coming to Jesus. As George Herbert said "Humble we must be, if to heaven we go; / High is the roof there, but the gate is low."
- **Counter-cultural** - Self-promotion was not just a mark of their society it is everywhere in our society. Whether it's at work, at home or even at church we are by nature those who want to promote ourselves. By nature we are not humble people and Jesus' words expose this in us. In reading these verses we need to examine our hearts and confess our arrogance and self-promotion before humbling coming to Jesus.
- **Jesus practised what he preached** - Philippians 2:5-11 is the classic passage for seeing how Jesus who had everything became nothing. Similarly 2 Corinthians 8:9 reminds us that "he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." As we reflect on our sinful self-promotion give thanks that Christ humbled himself and became obedient even to death on a cross for arrogant

self-promoters like us! Isn't that amazing? Here is hope and grace for those who are exposed by Jesus' words.

- **v12-14 - Jesus Exposes their Self-Serving Hospitality**

- **Hospitality that is Given not Exchanged** - Their hospitality (and I suspect most of ours) is often just an exchange of hospitality (v12.) We socialise with, and show hospitality to people who are like us, or will benefit and bless us in some way. In this sense we are just exchanging hospitality and this is what Jesus attacks. Instead of just exchanging hospitality we are to give hospitality to those who cannot pay us back. Genuine hospitality is selfless rather than self-serving. This was as counter-cultural then as it is now. Again if we really let Jesus' words examine our hearts then it will expose how self-serving we are by nature.

- **Jesus Practised what he Preached**

- The gospel is about God inviting in the marginalised who have got nothing to offer him. "While we were still sinners... Christ died for us..." "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved." Spiritually speaking we are poor, blind, crippled and lame. Spiritually speaking there is no way that we can "repay God." We have got nothing to offer Go. We cannot benefit him in some way and yet through Jesus he has invited us in to share in his banquet.
- If this is God has shown grace to us then Jesus is saying that we are to show that same selfless grace to others in our hospitality. Our attitude to the poor and marginalised is to reflect what God has done for us. This raises a challenging question for us to consider both individually and corporately: "What does my attitude to the poor say about my grasp of the gospel?" When we look back over the last few months and think about who we socialised with and who we invited into our home what sorts of people did we choose? And what does that say about our grasp of the gospel?
- As before this will leave us feeling horribly guilty and exposed and once we are in that position we need to humbly run to Jesus, confessing our wretchedness and taking hold of his gracious hospitality to sinful outcasts like you and me who could never pay him back!

- **v15-25 - Jesus' Exposes their Insincere Hospitality**

- **Who's Who?** - As with all parables it's worth making sure we know who represents who in the parable.
 - It's pretty clear that God is the man hosting the banquet.
 - From the context it also seems pretty clear that the first group of people who are invited but make their excuses are the religious establishment of Israel. They have the Old Testament and so they are in a sense the first in the queue to be invited to God's banquet and yet they refuse the invitation that Jesus brings and so v24 they will not get a taste of Jesus' banquet.
 - I take it that the servant who goes out to tell the guests that the banquet is ready is Jesus. He is the one who came to Israel announcing that God's heavenly banquet was ready and inviting them to come and yet the religious establishment refused to accept him and his invitation.
 - Finally I take it that in it's original context the poor, blind, lame and crippled are the social outcasts like the tax collectors, "sinners" and the marginalised who received Jesus and his invitation in Luke's gospel. Standing back you could also say that in a

sense the last lot of people who are invited in v23 could be Gentiles like us but I wouldn't push this too far. The big point Jesus is making is the same as in 13:29-30 all sorts of unexpected people will be at God's heavenly banquet and all sorts of people who you would expect to be there will not be there because they've rejected Jesus.

- **2 Invitations** - In those days there would be two invitations because without refrigeration it would take so long to get a big dinner prepared. The initial invitation went out in v16 and the implication is that the guests have RSVPd to say that they are coming. Then when everything is ready a servant is sent out to bring the guests and it's at this point that they make their excuses. In today's terms it's the equivalent of RSVPing to a posh dinner saying that you will come but then when the host sends a limo to collect you, you start making excuses that you can't come.
- **Insulting Excuses** - When you stop and think about it their excuses are terrible. Who buys property without first viewing it? No-one! Similarly who buys expensive farm equipment without seeing it or test-driving it? No-one! (5 yoke of oxen is like by 5 top of the range tractors today, you can ask Tim Lawrence how much that would cost.) The last person is the rudest of all because he doesn't even say sorry. Surely he knew he was going to be getting married when he received the first invitation. In each case they are basically saying, "I've got better things to do." Tragically many people today think they have got better things to do than investigate Jesus and his invitation to God's ultimate heavenly banquet.
- **The concern of the Master** - The punchline of the parable is there in v24 - if you refuse Jesus and his invitation then you're not going to be at God's heavenly banquet. It's also important to notice what this parable tells us about God. He has got everything ready for his banquet (through Jesus' death and resurrection) and he wants his house to be full of people regardless of who the people are. The blessings of the kingdom have been prepared, everything is now ready and God will not stop until his house is full!

Tricky Bits

- **"Are we just to show hospitality to the marginalised so as to get a heavenly reward?" (v12)**
 - On the surface it might seem like Jesus is advocating the sort of motivation that he's just criticised. Surely he's just said that we aren't to do it for what we can get out of it. When we look closely at v14 we will see that Jesus doesn't tell us to do it for the reward, he simply says that there will be some sort of reward. We are being encouraged to imitate the selfless love and hospitality that God has shown to us. We are to look to the cross and seek to reflect the cross in who we socialise with.
- **"Are we literally to compel people to come in?" (v23)**
 - As with all parables the danger is that we push each word too far. The big point in v23 is that God wants his house to be full. We cannot compel or force people to accept Christ but we are to be those (as Christ's ambassadors) who go out to all sorts of people in all sorts of places with the message "Come, for everything is now ready." The emphasis in v23 is therefore on "Go out..." rather than "compel."

Big Point

Jesus exposes us so that we will humbly come to Jesus, entering through the narrow door.

Suggested Applications

- Don't just wag the finger at the Pharisees, see yourself in the mirror that Jesus holds up in front of you.
 - As you study this passage let Jesus show you your hypocrisy (v1-6), your self-promotion (v7-11) and your self-serving (v12-14.) It's painful but it's necessary because otherwise we will be too proud to receive Jesus' invitation and enter through the narrow door.
 - We need to recognise that spiritually speaking we are the poor, blind, crippled and lame. Spiritually speaking we are the marginalised who are out in the streets, alleys and country lanes who have nothing to offer Jesus. As we recognise how undeserving we are we will be blown away by God's grace and selfless generosity to us that he should send his Son to die for us so that we might be welcomed into his banquet.
 - If we refuse to take a long hard look at ourselves in the mirror then we'll be underwhelmed by God's grace to us and this section shows us how dangerous that is - v24!!!
- As Jesus' people who have received his grace we are to be those who seek to imitate his selfless grace. This section shows us there are several areas where we need to be working this out.
 - Firstly it should be seen in our humility not just before God but before other people. Think long and hard and practically about what v7-11 will look like for you at home and at work and at church. What will it look like for you to take the lowest place at home or at work or at church? As always in our application lets actually come up with concrete applications. Don't just fly around in the clouds keeping it all vague and fluffy, land the application for yourself and your group in real life on the ground.
 - Secondly God's grace should be seen in our socialising and hospitality. Over the last few months who have you invited into your home and why did you invite them and not other people? (Be honest with yourself and God.) Was it genuinely out of selfless love and service motivated by God's grace to you? Or was it because of what those people would do for you in one way or another. Think about who the equivalent of the poor, lame, blind and crippled are today? Who are the outcasts and marginalised in our society, on your street, in our church, in your Home Group? What sorts of ways can you show real and genuine hospitality to them? (NB I don't think Jesus is talking about donating to a foodbank or a soup kitchen in v12-13. He's talking about Sunday lunch and dinner parties where you actually invite people into your home and sit around a table with them and share a meal with them. Don't get me wrong, charity and food banks are a good thing but these verses aren't about charity they're about hospitality.)
 - Thirdly God's grace should be seen in how we take out Jesus' invitation to all sorts of people everywhere. As Jesus' representatives the baton has been passed to us to go out and tell people to "Come for everything is now ready." How could you and your group actively reach out to people with this message?

Suggested Study

Starter Question - In this passage Jesus shows the religious leaders and ourselves what we are really like. Being exposed is never nice but can you think of situations where it is ultimately good for you?

The point here is simply to get people seeing that although being exposed is never pleasant it can often be for our good. Jesus will expose us in this passage but he does it for our good. He wants us to see what we are really like and humbly come to him and enter by the narrow door (13:22-30.)

Digging into v1-6

1. What do we learn about Jesus and the Pharisees in these verses?

We see Jesus' compassion and power to heal as well as his wisdom in turning the tables on the Pharisees who were trying to trap him. Their silence shows their hypocrisy. They say it's unlawful to show compassion and heal on the sabbath and yet would show compassion on their child or a cow if they were in difficulty.

Digging into v7-11

2. What is the big point Jesus is making with this parable?

If people are struggling then direct them to v11 where we see that Jesus is not just talking about dinner party etiquette, he's talking about final judgment where God will exalt the humble and humble the self-exalting. The message is clear, if we want to be part of God's banquet then we need to humble ourselves and come to Jesus.

3. How did Jesus practice what he preached in this parable?

Think Philippians 2 or 2 Corinthians 8:9 - Jesus who was rich became poor FOR OUR SAKES so that we who were poor might become rich. He humbled himself and became obedient to death and crucially he did that for us! It's vital people see this because here is the motivation for the Christian to live out what Jesus is teaching.

Applying v7-11

4. What will it look like for you to take "the lowest place"...

- 1. At Work?**
- 2. At Home?**
- 3. At Church?**

As always with application try and be as grounded and practical as possible. Get the group talking about specific applications rather than just general applications. Encourage the group to talk about how and why we find it so hard to be selfless in these different situations. In all of this keep bringing it back to the Lord Jesus and remembering the gospel and his selfless service for us! This is our motivation as Christians.

Digging into v12-14

5. What is the Big Point that Jesus is making in these verses?

Instead of exchanging hospitality we are to give hospitality without expecting anything in return. This (like most of this passage) is very counter-cultural and uncomfortable. Inviting in the marginalised and outcasts like the people in v13 won't be easy and may be quite costly yet this is exactly what God has done for us in Christ!

6. How did Jesus practice what he is preaching in these verses?

Spiritually we are the poor, blind, crippled and lame who have got nothing to offer to God and yet Jesus went to the cross and died for us to bring us in so that we can enjoy God's eternal, heavenly banquet with him! As always the gospel is the motivation and the model for living the Christian life.

Applying v12-14

7. Think of the people you have socialised with or invited into your home in the last 3 months. Why did we invite those people and not others?

This question might be very personal and people may not want to answer it because it will expose them in front of the group. If there's silence then be prepared to lead off in being honest.

8. How can we practically show selfless hospitality to those who are marginalised?

As always lets get practical and specific. In our groups there will be lots of different people with different homes, family situations and budgets. As a result the answer to this question will look very different for the different people in your group. Spend time as a group helping each other to think about how we can be showing real, selfless hospitality with what God has given us. No doubt some people will have excuses as to why they don't, "I have a small house," "I don't have much money/time?" "I've got to think about my kids?" Without being harsh we want to challenge whether these excuses really are valid in light of the gospel?

Digging into v15-24

9. What is the big point that Jesus was making to the people at the dinner party?

If the religious leaders reject Jesus then they will be shut out of God's heavenly banquet! Jesus is hammering in the point he was making in 13:22-30.

10. What do we learn about God from this parable and the whole passage?

We see lots of things but in particular we see that he will humble the self-exalting whilst exalting the humble. We also see that he has done everything to prepare the banquet and that he wants his house to be full of people regardless of who those people are.

11. What do we learn about ourselves from this parable and the whole passage?

We see that whoever we are we need to receive the invitation that Jesus offers if we're to enjoy God's heavenly banquet. We see that we are spiritually poor, blind, lame and crippled. We are spiritual outcasts and yet gloriously in his grace God invites us in!

Applying v15-24

12. How do you think we are meant to respond to this parable and the whole passage?

The obvious big application is to make sure that we humbly receive Jesus' invitation. Having done that we are then to go out to all sorts of people with this wonderful invitation, "Come for everything is ready." If there's time perhaps your group could talk about practical ways that you as a group could use hospitality to spread this invitation.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 18:9-14

Context

- ***The Pharisees in Luke***

- The Pharisees were devout religious people who were the pillars of society. They were so concerned about keeping God's law that they had "hedged" the law by adding extra conditions so as to make sure that they never got close to breaking the law.
- Yet despite their religious devotion they have grown increasingly hostile to Jesus through Luke's gospel (see 7:30, 11:37-41, 14:1-24 and 16:14 plus many more examples.) Crucially in this section of Luke which is all about salvation (see 13:23) these are people assume that they are in the kingdom and going to God's eternal banquet because of their self-righteousness. As with 14:1-24 Jesus is showing them and us that they are not "in" and instead need to humbly come to him for mercy if they are to be justified and welcomed into God's eternal kingdom.

- ***Tax Collectors in Luke***

- The tax collectors were Jews who were working for the occupying Roman authority by collecting taxes from their own people. Each tax collector would have a patch and would be required to raise a certain amount of money every year for the Romans from his patch. The tax collectors were free to raise more than the required amount and to keep the extra revenues. This was one of the big reasons why they were so hated by the population.
- In 3:12-13 and 19:1-10 we see that like the Pharisees (see 16:14) the tax collectors loved money and yet unlike the Pharisees, many of the tax collectors responded to Jesus in humble repentance and faith (see 5:27-32, 18:9-14 and 19:1-10.)

- ***Reversal in Luke***

- Throughout Luke's gospel we see that Jesus has come to bring a reversal. Time and again Jesus turns things upside down and on their head. To be more precise Jesus enters our fallen and broken, topsy-turvy world and he turns things the right way up, restoring them to the way God intended!
- This theme of reversal and turning things the right way up comes time and time again in Luke's gospel. For examples of this see 1:46-55, 1:68-79, 4:18-19, 10:13-15, 14:7-11 and 16:15 (you can no doubt think of many other examples.)

- ***Humility and Repentance in Luke***

- Repeatedly we are seeing that the only way to come to God and enter his kingdom is to come to Jesus in humility and repentance with empty hands ready to receive from Jesus. Again there are loads of examples of this but here are just a few; 5:31-32, 14:11, 15:17-21, 18:15-25 and 23:39-43.

- ***The Immediate Context in Luke 18***

- The connection between our passage (18:9-14) and the previous passage (18:1-8) is that both are parables about prayer. In both prayers we are seeing the sorts of prayers that God accepts and answers.
- The connection between this passage (18:9-14) and the next (18:15-30) is the theme of humbling coming to Jesus rather than exalting oneself. The kingdom belongs to those who will humbly come to Jesus with empty hands (the tax collector and the children) rather than the proud and self-exalting (the Pharisees and the Ruler.)

Structure

- **v9-10 - The Target Audience**

- **"Confident of their own Righteousness..."**

- We are not told exactly who these people are. They may be Pharisees or they may simply be the sorts of people who would have looked up to the Pharisees and thus Jesus uses the character of a Pharisee in his parable to represent his target audience.
- That they were "confident in their own righteousness" means simply that they believed that they were in the right with God because of their own efforts and achievements. They were confident that when they had to stand before God they could hand over their record and it would stand up to the scrutiny of Almighty God.
- Such an attitude is self-exalting and therefore incredibly arrogant and yet it is the default attitude of every human heart even the heart of believers. Let us not be so quick to distance ourselves from these people. If we do that then the impact of Jesus' parable will be lost on us.

- **"... Looked down on Others"**

- There is a crucial link between being confident in your own righteousness and looking down on others. If we find ourselves looking down on others and their sin and failings then the chances are that this is because we are actually confident in our own righteousness.
- The question to ask ourselves is not "Am I self-righteous?" but rather "In the last few weeks and months have I found myself looking down on other people whether that's in church, in my community, at work or in society?" If the answer is "Yes" (and if we are being honest that is the only answer we can give) then it will begin to show us the self-righteousness that lurks within us below the surface.

- **v11-12 - The Pharisee's Prayer**

- **Where does he pray?**

- He goes up to the temple to pray and then he stands by himself to pray. This could suggest that he wants to distance himself from the Tax Collector. He wants God to be clear that he, an upright Pharisee, has nothing to do with him, a traitorous, money-grabbing, pharisee.

- **How does he pray?**

- His prayer is marked by self-confidence. God is mentioned at the start of the prayer but after that God is peripheral to the prayer. Indeed v11 can be translated "The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself." If so then this Pharisee is really just shouting about his own achievements and self-righteousness. He's exalting himself before the people and God. Jesus warns us such behaviour will ultimately lead to being humbled by God.

- **What does he pray?**

- About himself and what he has done. At least four times in this prayer he says "I". This is all about himself and how he thinks that he has gone above and beyond the requirements of the law. His confidence in his own righteousness comes from how he is not like the blatant law-breakers, the robbers, evil-doers, adulterers etc. Yet despite his claims the Pharisees were not as different from the robbers and tax collectors as they claimed. 3:12-13 and 16:14 show us that both the tax collectors and the Pharisees clearly loved money. Both groups were worshipping money rather than God and so both groups were in need of God's mercy. Yet in this

parable the Pharisee, in contrast to the tax collector, is too blind and too proud to see his need for mercy.

- Unlike these "blatant sinners" the Pharisee fasts twice a week and gives a tenth of all he gets. The law only required you to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement. This man is fasting 103 times more than he needs to and so he is confident that he is in the right, unlike this tax collector. For what the law required with regard to Tithes see Leviticus 27:30-32, Numbers 18:21-24 and Deuteronomy 14:22-27.

- **v13 - The Tax Collector's Prayer**

- **Where does he pray?**

- Although the Tax Collector also goes to the temple we are told that he "stood at a distance." This could be in relation to the Pharisee or it could mean that he only remain in the outer courts of the temple rather than moving into the inner courts as perhaps the Pharisee had done. Regardless of exactly what it means we can take it to be a mark of his humility (v14), and his lack of confidence in his own righteousness (v9.)

- **How does he pray?**

- The contrast with the Pharisee is again stark. He does not look up to heaven again suggesting his lack of confidence and reverent fear in approaching God. Similarly he beats his breast which was a sign of contrition (see also 23:48) here is a humble and repentant man who recognises that God owes him nothing.

- **What does he pray?**

- Whereas the Pharisee's prayer was focused on himself and his religious achievements, the tax collector's prayer is focused on God and is an appeal for God's mercy. It is a prayer of humble and honest confession and a desperate appeal for mercy. The two men could not be more different in where, how and what they pray which sets us up to hear Jesus' verdict in v14.

- **v14 - Jesus Makes His Point**

- **Justified**

- The shock to the first readers was that it was the notoriously sinful tax collector who was justified and not the upstanding Pharisee. Here again is one of the big and unexpected reversals in Luke's gospel. To be justified is to be declared in the right by God. To be justified is for God to look upon someone and declare that it is "just as if they had always perfectly kept God's law."
- This theme of justification is one that will be expanded and developed in the rest of the New Testament. Paul could almost have been commenting on this parable when he says that "to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:8.) This justification is free to all because of the death of Christ and is needed by all because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of blood - to be received by faith" (Romans 3:23-25.)

- **Humble and Exalted**

- As mentioned in the context this theme of reversal with the self-exalting being humbled and the humbled being exalted comes throughout Luke's gospel. There are obviously similarities with our previous study in Luke 14:1-24 and hopefully the group will be able to pick up on the fact that this is a repeated theme.

Big Idea

God humbles the self-exalting and self-righteous but exalts and justifies those who humbly cry to him for mercy.

Suggested Application

• **Who do you look down upon?**

- In this parable Jesus tells us that our self-righteousness will be seen in our attitude to other people and in our prayers. In his book "Extreme Righteousness: Seeing Ourselves in the Pharisees" Tom Hovestol asks;

"How do we regard sinners who do not measure up and saints who have blown it? Do we subconsciously gloat over their misdeeds and glory in their shame? Do we subtly believe that we are incapable of their level of depravity and they are unlikely to achieve our level of goodness? Are we arrogant about our own avoidances and achievements?"

For me the answer is yes, and then some. I rarely verbalise these thoughts, or even acknowledge them to myself. But they are there. They surface in my secret reflections and in what I mutter under my breath. They come out in unguarded conversations about people not present. They pop out in prayers as I lament the evils of the culture more than personal and corporate sin. They slip out in conversation about failing parishioners and fallen fellow pastors. Is the contempt light flashing on your dashboard too? Warning! A critical, contemptuous spirit, emanates from a self-righteous heart."

• **Let us truly and deeply examine our hearts and our attitudes to other people to expose our self-righteousness.**

- And as we do that let us not wallow in our sin but rather follow the example of the Tax Collector, humbly coming, confessing our sinfulness and depravity and crying out for mercy! "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" and justified in Christ!

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question - In Jesus' day the Pharisees were seen as model citizens whilst Tax Collectors were looked down upon as the dregs of society who ripped people off. If Jesus were retelling the parable today what sort of characters would he use instead?

I'm sure you can think of a better starter question but the hope with this question is that it starts to get the group talking. There is no right or wrong answer here it is simply asking people for their opinions. Hopefully it will also get people to start thinking about the sorts of people that we tend to look down upon. Whilst we do not want to encourage this behaviour we do need to recognise that it will be there in all of us revealing our confidence in our own righteousness.

Digging into the passage

1. Compare the prayers of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector? (v11-13)

To help the group you could print off the table at the bottom of these notes and get them to complete it in pairs or smaller groups before coming back together. This would get everyone engaged with the passage and encourage everyone to speak even if it is only in smaller groups.

2. Who was Jesus targeting with this parable and what was his big message to them? (v9, 14)

Jesus is aiming this parable at those who, like the Pharisees, were confident of their own righteousness and therefore looked down on other people. You may need to tease out what is meant by righteousness and you may want to explore the connection between being confident in your own righteousness and looking down on others. Remember that it is really important that we are clear about the original target audience so that we can then correctly apply God's word to ourselves.

3. How does Jesus say that we can spot self-righteousness in ourselves? (v9, 11)

One of the ways that our self-righteousness will be seen is in our attitude to other people. If we find ourselves looking down on other people and their failings and how they don't measure up to us in one way or another then we are beginning to see the symptoms of our self-righteousness.

Help the group to see that we are all by nature self-righteous. It is the default of the human heart and even Christians should not be so arrogant or naive to claim that they are not still self-righteous.

Applying the Passage

4. As Evangelical Christians what sorts of people are we tempted to look down on and why?

This is probably the most important question of the study. It is also the hardest question to answer as it will involve exposing ourselves and confessing our sin to one another. This will be painful and everyone's natural tendency will be to shy away from this and simply to talk generally. Here's where you may need to step up as the group leader. Be prepared to go first in being honest about who you look down upon. Be prepared to be exposed for the sake of your group so that others will then have the confidence to be honest. We want to create a group where we can be honest in confessing our sins to one another without fear of being judged by each other.

The aim with this question is to set up the final question...

5. What is Jesus urging us to do with our self-righteousness and what encouragements and reassurances does this passage offer to us?

This passage is full of great comfort and reassurance to the person who will imitate the tax collector and humbly confess their sin to God and cry out to him for mercy. As we are exposed as self-righteousness and superior like the Pharisees we are then to imitate the Tax Collector. As we do that then there is great news that because of Christ we are justified in God's sight and will be exalted rather than humbled!

Finish by giving plenty of time for prayer and confession

Having study a passage about humble prayer and confession then the only right response is to spend time humbly praying and confessing our sin. You may want to do this as one big group or you may want to split into smaller groups to make it easier for people.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 20:20-26

Context

- **Opposition to Jesus in Luke's Gospel**
 - Opposition and hostility towards Jesus has been building throughout Luke's gospel. As Jesus has travelled towards Jerusalem the hostility has only intensified and now that he has arrived in Jerusalem (see 19:28-48) the opposition is coming to a climax. For a sense of the opposition to Jesus see (4:29, 6:11, 11:53-54, 13:17, 15:2, 19:47-48, 20:1-2, 20:9-19, 20:40 and 22:3-6.)
- **Historical Context of Roman Occupation**
 - Israel was an occupied nation and part of the Roman Empire. In Jerusalem in particular (where this incident takes place) there would be lots of Roman soldiers out on the streets. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would be painfully aware that they were an occupied people.
 - The particular tax in question was not collected by the tax collectors. This was a direct tax that was paid straight to Caesar. This tax was obviously very unpopular with the majority of the population. If Jesus comes out in favour of the tax then he will lose a large number of supporters which would be good news for the religious authorities (see 20:19 - they don't act against Jesus because they are scared of public opinion.) If Jesus comes out against the tax then he will be in trouble with the Roman authorities as a trouble-maker who is stirring up rebellion against Rome. Indeed this is what Jesus is falsely accused of at his trial (see 23:2.) If the Romans arrest Jesus then the Jewish leaders can keep their hands clean (remaining popular with the general population) whilst getting rid of Jesus.
- **Biblical Context of Submission to Rulers and Authorities**
 - Jesus' teaching here in Luke 20 is developed and expanded by both Peter (see 1 Peter 2:11-25) and Paul (Romans 13:1-7.) In all three cases we must recognise that the rulers and authorities in question were not democratically elected, they were brutal dictators who killed Jesus and persecuted his followers. It is important that we remember then when we come to thinking how Jesus' teaching applies to us today.

Structure

- ***Their Intention (v20)***
 - "*Spies... who pretended to be sincere*" - The teacher of the law and chief priests (referred to in v19) are the ones who are keeping a close watch on Jesus. Things are so heated between them and Jesus after his parable against them (20:9-19) that they now decide to send spies to catch Jesus out. Needless to say, it doesn't work.
 - "*They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said, so that they might hand him over to... the governor*" - The Jewish leaders cannot confront and arrest Jesus' directly because Jesus is so popular with the Jewish crowds. As a result their new strategy is to trap Jesus in such a way that will get him in trouble with the Romans. That way it will be the Romans rather than the Jewish leaders who arrest Jesus. This would be a win-win for the Jewish leaders; Jesus removed and they can keep their hands clean and maintain their popularity with their fellow Jews.
- ***Their Question (v21-22)***

- "Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" - After quite a lot of buttering Jesus up in v21 they finally deliver the killer question. As mentioned in the context they think that they have trapped Jesus because if he comes out in favour the tax he will lose the support of the people but if he comes out against the tax then he will be in trouble with the Romans.
- The crucial thing to see is that they believe that it is an "Either/Or" situation. In their minds "EITHER you pay taxes to Caesar OR you honour God." Jesus will show that you can and should do both!
- Their religion is one where you compartmentalise life. As with all religions they have erected a sacred/secular divide. Jesus pulls down such a divide and shows that following Jesus is about the whole of our lives and not just part of our lives.
- **Jesus' Insight (v23)**
 - *"He saw through their duplicity"* - Jesus knows exactly what they are trying to do. Time and again we have seen that Jesus knows what people are thinking and he knows their motives. See for example 4:23, 5:22, 7:39-40.)
- **Jesus' Answer (v24-25)**
 - *"Show me a denarius..."* - Jesus' answer is clever on many levels. Firstly he asks them for a Denarius. As they empty out their pockets and hand over the coin they are admitting that they already carry around this coin with Caesar's image and inscription on. In carrying around this Roman coin they are already recognising Caesar's authority and rule over them.
 - *"Whose image..."* The logic is simple. If it's got Caesar's image on it then it belongs to Caesar and so you should give back to Caesar what belongs to him and is owed to him. The implication therefore is that whatever bears God's image belongs to him. And who bears God's image? We do! Every human being is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) so that means that we are to give to God all that we have and all that we are.
 - *"Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"*
 - They had set the question up as an "Either... Or" but Jesus shows that it is really a "Both... And." Jesus refuses to walk into their trap. He shows how their compartmentalised view that divides the sacred and the secular is false and unbecoming to God. "Jesus' work for God does not challenge, but rather transcends Rome" (Bock.)
 - Jesus' teaching upholds that "Governments, even pagan government like Rome, have the right to exist and to expect its citizens to participate in contributing to its functions. Supporting such a government, including taxes, does not violate one's commitment to God" (Bock.)
 - We need to recognise that if God really is God then he is God of everything. There are not some things that are outside of God's influence or jurisdiction. As Abraham Kuyper said, "In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch over which Christ does not declare, 'That is mine!'"
 - As we consider how to relate to Caesar/Human Authorities we should ask the question, "Who put Caesar in power?" The answer is that God has put him in power and therefore to give to Caesar what is Caesar's is actually part of giving to God what is God's.
- **Their Response (v26)**

- A common theme that we are seeing in Luke's gospel is that Jesus' opponents try to trap him but end up confounded and silenced by him. For example see 14:4-6, 20:1-7, 19 and 20:40.

Tricky Bits

- ***"Jesus' teaching is fine for us in a democracy but what about Christians in places like North Korea?"***
 - I think the hardest part of this passage is not understanding what Jesus is saying but rather wrestling with how it applies. "Is Jesus really saying that Christians in North Korea should willingly submit to a regime that has killed and imprisoned thousands of Christians?" Closer to home, "How should Christians in the UK relate to a government that has introduced Same-Sex marriage, upheld the abortion laws and is in the process of closing down a Christian school because of its teaching of Biblical values?"
 - As mentioned previously we need to remember who Caesar was. He was not a democratically elected Prime Minister or President. He was brutal dictator who had invaded Israel and whose soldiers were on every street corner. This is the sort of authority that Jesus is telling Christians to submit to and give what is due. The rest of the New Testament is even clearer. Stop and read Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:11-26 and remember that in their original context the authorities in question were the Roman authorities and most likely the Emperor Nero who was known for brutally executing Christians.
 - We must not water down what Jesus and the rest of the Bible is teaching just because we do not like it. We need to recognise that God is sovereign even over unjust rulers and authorities and that he calls us to give them what they deserve. Paying our taxes and obeying the laws of the land (giving to Caesar what is Caesar's) is part of our bigger duty to "give to God what is God's."

Big Idea

- **Give to Caesar what is Caesar's as part of giving to God what is God's.**

Suggested Applications

- **You can't catch Jesus**
 - Throughout Luke's gospel we see that you can't put Jesus in the dock. You can't put him on trial. We might come to Jesus and throw our questions at him or try and trap him but it won't work. He won't play our games and instead we will be left exposed and silent.
- **Give to Caesar what is Caesar's**
 - There are so many different lines of application that you could consider with this. As long as you are clear on the big idea of the passage then feel free to explore the different questions and issues that the group come up with.
 - Here are just a selection of areas to consider when applying this passage;
 - Tax, Benefits and Money - there is a lot about tax avoidance at the moment but Jesus is clear that his people are to pay everything that they owe. Think about the implications for things like filling in our tax returns, claiming benefits, or paying cash in hand.
 - Laws of the Land - think about what this has to say about "mundane" things such as speed limits and other every day laws of the land as well as the bigger laws of the land.

- Respect and Honour - Romans 13:7 says that we are to give respect and honour to human authorities. Think about how this applies to political satire? What will it look like for Christian teachers or medical professionals to respect and honour the authorities over them when the laws and regulations being passed are contrary to their conscience?
- The issue of how Christians in this country relate to the state is incredibly relevant at the moment so why not pick out a few recent issues from the news and get the group to discuss how Jesus' teaching applies to these settings. Hopefully this should be a really stimulating and wide-ranging discussion.
- **Give to God what is God's**
 - Help the group to see that because we are made in God's image all that we are and all that we have belongs to God. There's not a single square inch of our lives that doesn't belong to him - including how we relate to authorities.
 - Help the group to see that our giving to Caesar what is Caesar's is not in contrast to giving to God what is God's but rather is part of giving to God what is God's. Here's our motivation for giving to Caesar what is Caesar's even when it is tough and costly.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question - This passage raises the issue of how Christians should relate to human authorities. Can you think of some recent examples of where this is particularly tough or complex?

Encourage the group not just to think of international examples but UK, local and personal examples. Ask them whether there are tough or complex issues around this at work? Spend some time gathering issues and examples that you can then return to when we apply this passage. Make sure you have thought of some examples yourself so that you can throw these in if the group is struggling.

Digging into the Passage

1. How are Jesus' opponents trying to catch him out? (v19-21)

- *They set up their question as an "Either... Or" so that if Jesus says they should pay the tax then he will become unpopular with the people. On the other hand if he says they should not pay the tax then he will get in trouble with the Romans. Either way he seems to be trapped.*

2. Why are they trying to catch Jesus out? (v19-21)

- *The Religious Leaders of Israel have become increasingly hostile to Jesus (see v19). Jesus has just spoken a very sharp parable against them (20:9-19) and they want to arrest him but they can't do this themselves because Jesus is so popular with the Jewish crowds. They are trying to either decrease Jesus' popularity or get the Romans to arrest him.*

3. How does Jesus answer their question and avoid their trap? (v23-25)

- *Jesus shows that it is not "Either... Or" but rather a case of "Both... And." Paying taxes to Caesar and worshipping God are not mutually exclusive. Indeed honouring and submitting to human authorities is part of our giving to God what is God's because he is God over everything even pagan human authorities like Rome.*

4. If we are to give back to Caesar everything that bears his image then what are we to give back to God?

- *This is an important question that will require the group to think beyond this passage. Jesus' logic is that if something bears Caesar's image then it belongs to him and should be given back to him. By the same logic whatever bears God's image belongs to God. As human beings we all bear God's image and so the logical implication is that we are to give all that we are and all that we have back to God in worship. If the group is struggling then you could direct them to Genesis 1:26 and Luke 10:27.*

5. Read Romans 13:1-7. What additional reasons does this passage give for submitting to all human rulers and authorities?

- *This passage shows us that all human authorities are established by God (v1) they are God's servant (v4) and therefore we should submit to them and give them everything that they deserve from us (v2, 5-7.) As we keep saying we need to remember the context into which this is written. This is written to the church in ROME! Just a few years prior to this letter Claudius had expelled the Jews (and therefore many Christians - see Acts 18:2.) Similarly in a few years time Nero would unleash a wave of persecution against Christians, brutally killing many. Indeed if tradition is to be believe then both Paul and Peter will be killed by the very authorities that they were telling Christians to submit to. Similarly remember that Jesus will be sentenced to death by Caesar's governor and crucified by Caesar's soldiers.*

Applying the Passage

6. Think back to the situations we thought about at the start. How does Jesus teaching apply to these situations?

- *It might be that studying this passage has caused people to think of more examples - great! Once the group have got the big idea of passage feel free to explore and apply this in whichever direction you and the group want to go. As always try to avoid bland, generalised application and instead try and be as specific as possible.*
- *Give people the chance to ask questions and raise objections and encourage the group to discuss these and wrestle with them.*

7. What will it look like for us to put Jesus' teaching into action?

- *To make sure that we are applying it personally this is an important question to ask. Get the group to think of personal situations where this teaching applies. See the suggested application for some examples but I'm sure you can think of many other situations where this applies.*

8. When we find it difficult or uncomfortable to obey Jesus' teaching what do we need to remember from this passage?

- *This is not easy teaching. Following Jesus in this way is getting harder and harder for us and so we need to remember why it is that he is calling us to submit to authorities and give them what is there's. Ultimately all human authorities are subject to God and so submitting to authorities is just one part of our submission to God. Everything (including pagan authorities) belongs to God and so giving to Caesar what is Caesar's is part of giving to God what is God's.*

No doubt this study will have raised all sorts of issues and situations where this teaching applies. Encourage the group to spend some time praying for one another and the situations mentioned before you finish your time together.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Luke 22:31-46

Context

- **Luke 22-23 - Jesus' Suffering and Death bring Fulfilment**
 - Time and again in these chapters we are told that Jesus' imminent suffering and death is fulfilling the Old Testament (22:22, 22:37, 23:30, 23:32, 23:34-36, 23:44, 23:45, 23:46.)
 - These chapters are also full of examples of how Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen to him. Things might seem out of Jesus' control but in reality he is in complete control. Indeed Jesus will be mocked as a prophet and yet throughout these chapters his prophecies repeatedly prove true. He is God's prophetic, suffering servant. (22:12-13, 22:22, 22:31-34, 22:40, 46, 22:60-62, 22:64.)
 - Remember that the theme of fulfilment is a key theme in Luke's gospel. He has written his gospel about "the things that have been fulfilled among us" (1:1) "so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." For more on this theme of fulfilment go back and look at the introduction to Luke's gospel that we covered at Pit Stop.
- **The Cup**
 - Throughout the Old Testament the image of the cup is used to represent the idea of suffering and the wrath of God (Psalm 75:8-9). Jesus is therefore praying that the suffering and punishment that he is about to experience might be taken away from him and yet this request is secondary to his submission to the Father's plan. Jesus' commitment to the will of his Father never wavers. He is in effect praying, "Is there any other way?" As the angel comes to strengthen him and then as the crowd comes to arrest him, the answer from the Father is, "No."

Structure

- **v31-34 - Jesus' Followers Will Face Opposition From Satan**
 - **"Sift all of you... But I have prayed for you Simon"**
 - Satan wants to sift (literally take to pieces) all the disciples not just Simon. Be aware that this plural is clearer in the 2011 NIV than in the 1984 NIV.
 - Simon is specifically addressed because he is a first among equals and will prove to be a figure of leadership amongst the apostles (see Acts 1:15 and the other early chapters of Acts.) This is why Jesus has specifically prayed for Simon. All of the disciples will fail Jesus in one way or another and so as the leader it will be Simon's job to strengthen and restore the others.
- **"... That your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."**
 - When Jesus speaks of Simon's faith not failing he is saying that Peter's fail will not fail permanently. Simon's faith will fail when he denies Jesus but this failure will not be final. He will turn back and be restored by Jesus and he must then strengthen the other disciples.
 - There is a big warning here. If even someone like Peter who was so close to Jesus can fail then all of us can and will fail Jesus. Yet there is also a great encouragement here because we see that with Jesus failure is never final. In Jesus there is grace and forgiveness that will restore the humble and repentant and recommission us to serve Jesus afresh.

- The theme of strengthening is key in this passage. It is mentioned explicitly here in v32 but is also implicit in v40, v43, and v46.
- **v35-38 - Jesus' Followers Will Face Opposition From Society**
 - ***Be Prepared***
 - With Jesus' imminent suffering, death and departure things are going to change (notice the key phrase in v36 "But not...") and as a result the disciples need to be prepared. Society will not welcome them with open arms so the disciples need to be prepared.
 - ***Jesus' Suffering is both a Fulfilment of the Old Testament and a Warning to Us***
 - As previously mentioned the theme of fulfilment is strong in these chapters and Jesus' death will fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12.
 - In the context of these verses Jesus is also warning the disciples that because he is going to be rejected, suffer and die so the disciples will be rejected and suffer as well.
 - From their response in v36 it seems that the disciples do not really understand Jesus' warning (see how they sleep rather than praying in the garden v45-46.) In a similar way Peter appears to be naive about the severity of the trial that he is about to face (see v33-34).
- **v39-46 - In The Face Of Opposition, Jesus' Followers Must Follow Jesus' Example And Depend On God in Prayer**
 - ***"Pray that you will not fall into temptation..."***
 - Twice Jesus tells them to do this (v40 and v45). The specific temptation that they were facing was the temptation to abandon Jesus in the coming hours.
 - Jesus' command (v40 and v45) and his example (v32 and v42) clearly shows that the only way to stand in the face of opposition and the temptation to abandon Jesus is to depend on God in prayer.
 - In these verses Jesus does not simply tell us to humbly depend on God, he also models what humble dependence and submission to God really looks like.
 - ***Jesus' Prayer***
 - ***Temptation***
 - At this time Jesus faces the temptation to not submit to his Father's plan. Back in 4:1-13 Satan had tempted Jesus by offering him a kingdom without suffering (see 4:5-7.) Jesus resisted Satan and yet intriguingly 4:13 finishes by saying "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." Now in ch22 Satan is mentioned again (22:3 and 22:31) suggesting that in Satan's mind now is the opportune time to try and tempt Jesus away from the Father's plan.
 - So both Jesus and his disciples face temptation, though the temptation is different. Jesus is tempted to abandon the Father's plan whilst the disciples are tempted to abandon Jesus.
 - ***Anguish***
 - Luke is keen to emphasise the anguish that Jesus is experiencing. He knelt to pray rather standing as was normal (v41), he requires strengthening by an angel (v43), he is in anguish (v44), he prays more earnestly (v44) and his sweat was like drips of blood (v44.) Luke wants us to see that anguish and turmoil that

Jesus is going through. He knows the horror of what he is about to face as he drinks the cup of suffering and wrath. In this we see both the divinity of Jesus to know what is going to happen but also the humanity of Jesus in his anguish at the prospect of what is going to happen.

- **Dependence**

- Jesus shows the disciples and us how to respond to the temptation, trials and opposition that we will face as his people. The only right response is to humble recognise our weakness and depend entirely upon God in prayer.

- As Bock says in his commentary;

"Prayer will protect them from unfaithfulness and will encourage them to faithfulness and perseverance. Prayer is important because it expresses a need for God, a desire to depend on him and to rest in his care. This attitude is what the disciples need in the face of these difficult moments... The way to faithfulness in the midst of hostile rejection of Christ is a dependent spirit that communes with God."

- **Submission**

- Some see Jesus' prayer as proof that his submission to God wavered and yet look how v42 begins and ends. As Bock says,

"... the prayer closes as it began—with Jesus expressing his commitment to God's will. His attitude is exemplary. He makes known the desire of his heart to God, but his primary concern is to accomplish God's will."

Tricky Bits

- **Satan (v31)**

- To our western ears mention of Satan can seem strange and uncomfortable and yet throughout the Bible we are presented with the picture that Satan is real and he is the enemy of God's people. We live in a culture where if you can't see something (i.e. it's spiritual) then it must not be real. The Bible does not have such a simplistic worldview.
- Satan is real and he is a threat to God's people. Here he wants to destroy the disciples and yet he has to ask. Satan may be real and he may be powerful but ultimately Jesus is in control. God is sovereign and so Satan can only ask to sift. In this way these verses present a picture that is very similar to the one found in Job 1-2. Satan is active but even in this hour of trial Jesus is still in control. Satan fails to destroy Peter because Jesus intercedes for him. These verses therefore present us with a warning and a great encouragement to depend upon God in the face of both spiritual and social opposition.

- **Does Jesus contradict himself? (v35-38)**

- Back in 9:3 and 10:4 he had told his disciples not to take these things but now the situation has changed. Jesus is going to suffer and die and after the resurrection the disciples will not have him with them in the same way that they had previously experienced.
- Following Jesus in the future is not going to be easy for them. They should not expect open doors and red-carpet treatment. Instead they will experience something of the hostility and opposition that Jesus experienced. As a result they should be prepared. That is the general message of v36 and it is best to focus on this general message rather than getting tied down in specifics.

- **What does Jesus mean by "That's enough!"? (v38)**

- In v36 Jesus has not necessarily been talking literally. He has been telling them to be prepared rather than ready for an actual war. This is made apparent in v49-51. The disciples response in v38 shows that they have not really understood the threat that they face or what Jesus is saying. Jesus' reply of "That's enough!" therefore does not mean "two swords is enough" but instead has the sense of "Stop talking like this" and with these words the conversation is finished.
- ***Did Jesus actually sweat blood? (v44)***
 - I don't think this is worth getting too bogged down in but it is worth noticing that Luke says "his sweat was *like* drops of blood..." rather than saying "his sweat was drops of blood." This leaves the possibility that Luke is speaking metaphorically to emphasise Jesus' anguish. Either way the same point is being made, Jesus prayed with great anguish and intensity as he depended upon God.

Big Idea

Following Jesus brings opposition so depend on God in prayer.

Suggested Application

- **Don't be naive about the opposition that we face**
 - Throughout this section the disciples do not fully grasp the scale of the opposition that they face. When Jesus is talking about his death they are busy arguing about greatness (v24), they think that two swords is enough (v38) and they sleep rather than praying as Jesus told them to (v45.)
 - As Christians in Britain we can forget that we face both spiritual and social opposition and hostility. As part of the study it would be good to explore what this can look like in practice. The opposition we face might seem small compared to that faced by other Christians in other parts of the world but it is real none the less. Get the group to talk about the opposition that they face. It might be in their families, at work, school, from neighbours. You could also talk about the growing opposition we face from society at large as well as talking about the spiritual opposition and temptations that we as Christians in our increasingly hostile society.
- **Acknowledge our weaknesses**
 - Again the disciples, and specifically Peter, think that they are strong enough to withstand Satan's attacks and human opposition on their own. They are a warning to us that on our own we are weak and powerless and will certainly fall if we are not reliant on God. Thinking of myself, the biggest reason why I don't depend on God in prayer as I should is because I don't see how weak and vulnerable I really am.
- **Depend on God in prayer**
 - This is the big application of the passage. We will face opposition and we are to be weak to stand on our own so we must depend on God. Here Jesus provides us with a great example of what that looks like. Think about the battles and struggles we face and spend time praying together in dependence on God.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question

- 1. When we talk about Christians facing opposition, what sort of things come to mind? What sorts of trials and opposition do we face as Christians in Britain today?**

Although this isn't a very cheery way to start the study it will help to set up the application questions at the end. This whole study is about how we are to react when faced with trials and opposition and so we need to start by focusing on the sorts of difficulties we face. Whilst we must acknowledge that the trials and difficulties we face seem small compared to those faced by Christians in other parts of the world we must not think that we do not face any trials or oppositions.

Digging into v31-34

- 2. From these verses, what do we learn about;**

- 1. Jesus?**

We see his sovereignty and control in knowing exactly what is and what will happen (v31-32.)

We also see his care for his followers in praying for Peter (v32)

We also see that failure isn't final with Jesus in that Peter will turn back and be restored to serving Jesus (v32.)

- 2. Simon?**

He's in danger even though he doesn't realise it. If it weren't for Jesus praying then his faith would ultimately fail. (v31-32)

We also see that he is seriously over-confident of his ability to stand with Jesus (v33-34).

Perhaps we can see something of ourselves in Peter?

We see that although he will deny Jesus he will be restored - great news!

- 3. The Disciples?**

Again they face a real spiritual threat though they seem completely oblivious to it and don't seem to be taking it too seriously.

- 4. Satan?**

He is real and he is a threat but he can only ask. God is still sovereign and Satan's plans are thwarted as Jesus prays for his people.

This sort of fact-finding question should help the whole group get into the passage and talk about what they have found. These are fairly straight forward observation questions. If you have a big group you could split into smaller groups for this part to get as many people involved as possible.

Applying v31-34

- 3. Think about the trials, temptations and opposition that we face. What warnings and encouragements do these verses contain for us?**

We face spiritual opposition and temptation to deny Jesus because Satan is our enemy who wants to destroy God's people. Yet God is still sovereign, Satan can only ask and Jesus intercedes for his people! How amazing is that!!!

Digging into v35-38

- 4. Why is Jesus saying the opposite of what he had said before? (See 9:3 and 10:4 if necessary.)**

The key here is to see that with Jesus' imminent death and departure the situation for the disciples is going to change dramatically. "But now" is the key here. In this new situation they need to be prepared!

Applying v35-38

5. Think of the challenges, hostility and opposition that we face as Christians. What is Jesus saying to us in these verses?

Jesus is telling us that we need to be prepared. We need to be realistic about how society will respond to us and we need to be ready and prepared. As a result we shouldn't take Jesus' literally and walk around Bessacarr with swords.

Digging into v39-46

6. Jesus repeatedly tells them to pray so that they will not be tempted. What specific temptations do you think they were facing?

In the context it would seem that the particular temptation that they faced was the temptation to deny Jesus and abandon him with opposition came.

Applying v39-46

7. Think of the trials and opposition we face. In what way do you think Jesus praying is an example to us?

Jesus shows us what it looks like to depend upon God for the strength to stand up in the face of temptation. He also shows us what it looks like to submit to God's will and go God's way even when that is going to be incredibly tough. We can take comfort from the fact that he faced the ultimate trial of the cross so that God's wrath will not fall on those who are in Christ.