

THE UPSIDE DOWN LIFE OF JESUS

SUMMER DEVOTION



“WHAT MAN OF YOU, HAVING A HUNDRED SHEEP,
IF HE HAS LOST ONE OF THEM, DOES NOT LEAVE THE
NINETY-NINE IN THE OPEN COUNTRY, AND GO AFTER THE
ONE THAT IS LOST, UNTIL HE FINDS IT?”
LUKE 15:4

Everything Jesus did, he did for the one. Jesus worked miracles for the one. Jesus mentored disciples for the one. Jesus expelled demons for the one. Jesus taught crowds for the one. Jesus faced mistrust and persecution for the one. Jesus laid down his life for the one. And Jesus was raised from the dead for the one.

You are the one. Across the world and across history, many of us have also been the “one.” But everything Jesus did, everything Jesus does: it is all for the one, and it is all for you.

This reading guide is an invitation for you to see everything Jesus did for the one—that is, everything Jesus did for you. It’s a tour of the life of Jesus, focused on the Gospel of Luke. Luke’s gospel was written by someone who knew a lot from people who had beheld the life of Jesus. His book exists so that his friends—including us—would have a clear telling of Jesus’s story, empowering us to know the foundation of our faith with clarity and certainty.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

OPTION 1: READ ALL FOUR GOSPELS

If you want to read through all four Gospels, use the Luke reading in the orange box on Monday and Tuesday. Then follow the rest of the reading guide on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday as you read through the other Gospels.

OPTION 2: READ LUKE ONLY

If reading all four Gospels feels overwhelming, or if you'd prefer to move more slowly, focus only on the Luke reading in the orange box. Take the entire week to read and reflect on those chapters before moving on to the next week's reading.

The Gospel of John says, “these [stories] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). That is our heart for you as you read the biblical tellings of the life of Jesus. Our desire is for you to believe in Jesus, to grow as a Jesus follower, and experience the abundance of life he offers to all of us. With love,

Jon, Damen, and Mackenna

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

AUTHOR: Luke does not identify himself, but the book shows a highly educated writer with deep knowledge of the Old Testament. Early church tradition identified the author as Luke, the physician (Colossians 4:14).

DATE: 80 AD, possibly earlier

AUDIENCE: Theophilus, who likely sponsored Luke's writing to Christians who wanted a deeper understanding of their faith. These readers knew Jewish Scripture well and were familiar with Gentile culture.

HOW IT WAS WRITTEN: Luke used much of Mark's Gospel, along with stories preserved by early Christians and likely a now-lost source containing many of Jesus's teachings.

PURPOSE: In 1:1–4, Luke tells his patron Theophilus that he compiled his writing so that Theophilus could have a reliable account of Jesus's life.

From the book's content, we see that Luke wanted to show how the story of Jesus's life, the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and the growth of the church (told in Acts) are all part of one big story that starts in the OT and continues with today.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

AUTHOR: Early church tradition names Mark—the John Mark mentioned in Acts 12—as the author. Fragmentary writings from a second-century Christian named Papias also say that Mark talked a lot with Peter as he compiled his Gospel. For that reason, people take Mark as the Gospel with Peter’s perspective.

DATE: Late 60s AD, when the Jewish-Roman war of 66–70 was heating up.

HOW IT WAS WRITTEN: Mark was the first Gospel. Some parts may have come from an early written version of the story of the cross, and maybe some written sayings of Jesus. In large part, it drew on stories about Jesus that would have existed through word of mouth in the form of oral tradition or eyewitness storytelling.

PURPOSE: Mark probably wrote his Gospel as a teaching tool for a community that was having a harder and harder time accessing the stories of Jesus through word of mouth. As the first wave of Christians started to age and die, and as the Christian movement grew, there was a need to have the stories of Jesus’s ministry, death, and resurrection written down and circulated.

AUDIENCE: Mark’s audience was probably made of new-ish Christians who wanted to know more of the background lore. Because of how it emphasizes the suffering of Jesus, Mark’s earliest readers may have experienced persecution and needed a reminder that they follow a Messiah who did not avoid suffering (see 8:31–9:1, 10:45).

WEEK ONE _____ MAY 31 – JUNE 6

FAST TRACK READING PLAN

READ:

- Luke 1:1–2:52

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- As Jesus is born, everyone notices something special is happening. What do people say about the meaning of Jesus arriving?
- How can Jesus mean so much to you?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- Mark 1–3

GUIDING QUESTION:

- The book of Mark begins with “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God.”
- What kind of thing is beginning, based on the stories included in these chapters?

THURSDAY

READ:

- Mark 4

GUIDING QUESTION:

- Jesus says two almost-opposite things: that he speaks in parables to hide things and confuse people on purpose (4:11–12) and that everything hidden will be revealed (4:21–23).
- As you read the parables, can you come up with a way to make those statements make sense to you?

FRIDAY

READ:

- Mark 5–6

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Jesus does miracles in these chapters; sometimes they work, and sometimes they fall apart. Why?
- How is the faith of the people related to Jesus’s power?

WEEK TWO _____ JUNE 7– JUNE 13

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 3:1–4:44

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Even Jesus needs to prepare for his work. What does Jesus think of his own ministry and calling?
- What do you see in Jesus's preparation that you would want to learn from?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- Mark 7:1–8:21

GUIDING QUESTION:

- Some people understand Jesus and some people don't, much to Jesus's own frustration.
- What seems to separate those who "get it" from those who don't?

THURSDAY

READ

- Mark 8:22–10:52

GUIDING QUESTION:

- This big section of Mark begins and ends with the story of a blind man's sight being restored.
- How do the stories in between those healings of the blind men "open up eyes" by unveiling the mysteries of what Jesus is really up to?

FRIDAY

READ

- Mark 11

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Who is excited about Jesus arriving in Jerusalem, and who is unhappy?
- Why do people react to Jesus in such different ways?

WEEK THREE

JUNE 14– JUNE 20

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 5:1–7:17

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Jesus gets famous quickly; people find lots of things about him interesting.
- What in this section—whether Jesus’s miracles, teaching, or something else—is most interesting to you?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- Mark 12–13

GUIDING QUESTION:

- In these chapters, Jesus says things that help his disciples deal with major changes in history and institutions.
- How do the stories and words of Jesus in these chapters comfort the hurting and hurt the comfortable?

THURSDAY

READ

- Mark 14

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How does Jesus respond to everyone around him denying, betraying, and misunderstanding him?
- How does Jesus remain true to his convictions about his identity and mission?

FRIDAY

READ

- Mark 15–16

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- As Mark tells the story of Jesus’s death, he doesn’t shy away from the brutality of it. How do you feel reading this “rough around the edges” version of Jesus’s death?
- What is it like to read up to 16:8 and then just *stop*?

Special note about 16:9–20.

You’ll notice in your Bibles that 16:8 is usually followed with a note saying something like “the earliest and most reliable manuscripts omit 16:9–20.” That is because copies of Mark from before 400, and ancient Christians’ quotations of Mark, include nothing past 16:8. Here’s what’s probably going on: someone was bothered by Mark’s Gospel ending abruptly at 16:8 with an empty tomb and no stories of Jesus’s resurrection appearances (whether or not that’s how the original version ended). So someone decided to add a resurrection appearance story inspired in part by Matthew and Luke’s Gospels. That theory makes sense of why the oldest copies of Mark end at 16:8 and why 16:9–20 has wording and style that differs from the rest of the book. I (Jon) recommend treating 16:9–20 as a window into how our ancient brothers and sisters in Christ interpreted the Gospels.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

AUTHOR: Ancient Christian tradition attributes this book to Matthew, the tax collector Jesus had called. But the book doesn't name an author. Whether Matthew the Apostle or not, the author of this book understood the Old Testament and Jewish tradition very well.

DATE: 80 AD or so – after the Gospel of Mark has been around for a bit, and before the books from 100 AD that draw on Matthew.

HOW IT WAS WRITTEN: Matthew is in many ways an expanded version of Mark. It was likely written by copying, pasting, and lightly reworking the majority of the Gospel of Mark, while incorporating things that Jesus said and taught. Most scholars believe that Matthew and Luke drew on the same written collection of Jesus sayings.

PURPOSE: This book works really hard to show that Jesus's teachings could make someone more righteous than the Jewish religious elite (5:20). Jesus, in a way, is presented as "Moses 2.0," giving a newer, truer, and better version of the Old Testament law. Its audience had likely just broken away from mainstream Judaism. This Gospel shows how they could be in line with the Old Testament, while also separate from other Jewish groups.

AUDIENCE: It was written for a Jewish-Christian community that was trying to define itself next to rival Jewish groups. While many of the intended readers were Jewish, this Gospel works very hard to show that Jesus didn't call only Jewish people. Non-Jewish Christians were shown that they had a place in the community Jesus had built.

WEEK FOUR

JUNE 21 - JUNE 27

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 7:18–9:62

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Why do people get mad at Jesus?
- What are you learning about when it's time to be easygoing, and when it's ok to say things not everyone will like?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- Matthew 1–2

GUIDING QUESTION:

- If you read the Bible all the way through in order, these are the first chapters after the Old Testament.
- How do these chapters link back to the Old Testament?

THURSDAY

READ:

- Matthew 3–4

GUIDING QUESTION:

- These chapters show Jesus prepare for his ministry. Why did Jesus, of all people, need to prepare?

FRIDAY

READ:

- Matthew 5–7

GUIDING QUESTION:

- This is the Sermon on the Mount, and it might be the most important block of words from Jesus in the whole Bible.
- As you read, ask yourself: what would your life be like if you actually did what Jesus asks people to do in these chapters?

WEEK FIVE

JUNE 28 - JULY 4

SUMMER CAMP BREAK

THURSDAY

READ:

- Matthew 8–9

GUIDING QUESTION:

- We have a collection of miracle stories in between two big blocks of teaching.
- What do these miracles tell us about the character of Jesus?

FRIDAY

READ:

- Matthew 10–12

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Trusting in Jesus can be hard.
- What do these chapters reveal about how hard it can be to trust Jesus?
- What do they show about how trusting in Jesus is worth it?

WEEK SIX

JULY 5 - JULY 11

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 10–14

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Jesus teaches on a wide variety of topics in these chapters. Choose three passages from these chapters where Jesus really speaks to you, where you are in life, right now.
- What is God showing you about yourself in your life in those passages?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- Matthew 13

GUIDING QUESTION:

- This is the chapter “big church” is working through in the summer sermon series.
- How do these parables reveal the depth of our dependence on Jesus to understand or do anything?

THURSDAY

READ:

- Matthew 14–17

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How do you see reactions to Jesus—both positive and negative—get more intense?
- How do you see Peter himself react both positively and negatively to Jesus?

FRIDAY

READ:

- Matthew 18–20

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do these chapters tell us about who really matters, and who is the most important to Jesus?

WEEK SEVEN _____ JULY 12 - JULY 18

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 15:1–19:27

GUIDING QUESTION:

- Throughout these chapters, Jesus shows how much he cares about finding the lost. Pick one or two stories that mean the most to you; how do those stories show the way in which God cares for you so that you don't have to be lost?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- Matthew 21–23

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Why does Jesus absolutely rip into the religious elite?
- Are there bad ways of being a Christian that some of Jesus's callouts would ask us to change?

THURSDAY

READ:

- Matthew 24–25

GUIDING QUESTION:

- What makes the difference between someone who is ready for the return of Jesus, and someone who is not?

FRIDAY

READ:

- Matthew 26–28

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How much rejection does Jesus suffer at his death?
- How does Jesus's defeat get reversed at the moment of his death and resurrection?

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

AUTHOR: The book is written as though the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (we know that’s John by process of elimination), is the one whose perspective shapes the book. That’s why this is called the Gospel of John, even though the author doesn’t name himself. The identity of the author is not that important; what matters is that we read through the perspective of someone Jesus loves, because Jesus loves us too.

DATE: 90s AD, but pieces of it came together before then.

HOW IT WAS WRITTEN: John has two parts: the so-called “book of signs” (chapters 1–11), which shares stories of Jesus’s miracles, and a “book of glory” (chapters 12–20), which tells the story of Jesus’s last week. Chapter 21 was probably added after, as an epilogue. Each of those “books” may have circulated independently before the whole Gospel was written, but that’s mostly a guess. Whatever steps were involved, the Gospel of John represents Jesus stories that the “Beloved Disciple’s” community found valuable.

PURPOSE: This Gospel gives a definitive purpose statement: “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). This book is meant to persuade people to believe in Jesus, though it also serves to comfort a community that was going through trouble.

AUDIENCE: Because the book is interested in showing off signs that Jesus’s claims are true, it seems like it was written to help non-Christians consider the offer of believing in Jesus. But because of the reminders of persecution (see especially 15:18–16:4), this Gospel was likely also built to comfort a community dealing with the trauma of their home Jewish community having excommunicated them.

WEEK EIGHT

JULY 19 - JULY 25

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 19:28–21:38

GUIDING QUESTION:

- Many stories in this section are about how the Jerusalem system centered on festivals and rituals at the temple is about to come to an end.
- What does this tell you about the things that have to end before Jesus gives us our new beginnings?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- John 1–4

GUIDING QUESTION:

- These chapters show lots of people having their own, separate one-on-one encounters with Jesus.
- Whose encounter with Jesus resonates with you?

THURSDAY

READ:

- John 5–7

GUIDING QUESTION:

- These chapters talk about things we might all need like healing, bread, and water.
- What do the stories and the teachings of Jesus tell us about what we truly need, and how Jesus meets our needs.

FRIDAY

READ:

- John 8–10

GUIDING QUESTION:

- Controversy heats up a lot between the Jewish elite and Jesus, and even people who respond well to Jesus, like the man whose blindness is healed.
- If you were getting in trouble for believing in Jesus, how might these chapters encourage you?

Special note on 7:53–8:11

As with Mark 16:9–20, your Bible may notify you that the oldest ancient copies of John skip the story of the woman caught in adultery. The story was probably not in the original complete Gospel of John. The event probably happened, and the story was passed along by early Christians. It was sometimes included in Luke, sometimes in John, and not always in the same place. Because it was definitely not an original piece of John's Gospel, not all Bible-believing scholars agree on calling this passage "scripture."

WEEK NINE

JULY 26 - AUGUST 1

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 22-23

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- How is the innocence and righteousness of Jesus shown in the story of his death?
- What does it mean that someone so good would die for sinners like us?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- John 11-12

GUIDING QUESTION:

- In these chapters, people need a lot from Jesus.
- What hope do you see Jesus offer to those who trust in him?

THURSDAY

READ:

- John 13-14

GUIDING QUESTION:

- What do these chapters show us about the love Jesus has for all of us?

FRIDAY

READ:

- John 15-17

GUIDING QUESTION:

- What do these chapters tell you about how God is truly with you, no matter what?

WEEK TEN

AUGUST 2 - AUGUST 8

FAST TRACK

READ:

- Luke 24

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- When the resurrected Jesus talks to his disciples in Luke, he helps them understand what they had been confused about.
- Why does Jesus coming back from the dead unlock so much for us?

WEDNESDAY

READ:

- John 18–19

GUIDING QUESTION:

- How does this telling of Jesus's trial and execution show Jesus's dignity and reveal that he was in control the entire time?

THURSDAY

READ:

- John 20–21

GUIDING QUESTION:

- These chapters show an encounter or conversation that the risen Jesus has with several people—Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Peter. Which conversation resonates the most with you?

FRIDAY

Catch Up Day!