

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY FOR TEEN GIRLS

KRISTI MCLELLAND

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Luke
**IN
THE**
Land

FOR TEEN GIRLS

**WALKING WITH JESUS IN
HIS FIRST-CENTURY WORLD**

KRISTI MCLELLAND

Luke
IN
THE *Land*

FOR TEEN GIRLS

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About the Author

KRISTI MCLELLAND is a speaker, teacher, and college professor. Since completing her Master of Arts in Christian Education at Dallas Theological Seminary, she has dedicated her life to discipleship, to teaching people how to study the Bible for themselves, and to writing about how God is better than we ever knew by explaining the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens. She has written two other Bible studies: *Jesus and Women* focuses on Jesus's earthly ministry and His interactions with first-century women, while *The Gospel on the Ground* follows the early church through the book of Acts. Her great desire for people to truly experience the love of God birthed a ministry in which she leads biblical study trips to Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

For more information about Kristi and what she's up to, visit: newlensbiblicalstudies.com.

From the Author

On October 7, 2023, I was sitting in a restaurant in the Newark airport, enjoying a cheese plate and waiting for my flight to Tel Aviv, Israel. I anticipated joining up with over three hundred people for our biblical study trip together with Lifeway. As I waited, my phone lit up, notifying me that my flight to Tel Aviv had been canceled due to “unrest in the region.” My heart seized. I knew something had gone terribly wrong. I will never forget that helpless, heartbroken, and gutted feeling as I sat in the airport—now waiting for my flight to take me back to Tennessee.

News outlets have reported that October 7, 2023 was the bloodiest day for Jewish people since the Holocaust. It has been referred to as “Israel’s 9/11.” In the days following October 7, I felt such deep grief and lament, shock and disbelief—a profound sadness I could feel in my very bones.

I started thinking about the fact that one month earlier, in September of 2023, I was IN Israel with the Lifeway video team as we filmed all of the teachings you will experience in this 7-session series. That filming project was a stretch for me in so many ways. It was a hard yes to give because my heart is to take people to Israel.

But the Lord has been impressing upon my heart over the last few years (since COVID-19) that I need to bring Israel here more and more. This has been a hard thing for me to submit to as I love being in Israel more than anything else.

I submitted to the adventure of writing *Luke in the Land*, and I reluctantly submitted to filming the teachings in Israel. But the true surrender to it has come since October 7. With COVID and now the events of October 7 and following, I’m surrendered to this adventure of trying my best to bring Israel here more and more. My heart feels both agreement and yielding to be more open to these things.

Tragedy sometimes works in strange ways as it changes us, diverts us, and often moves us into new creative and innovative adventures. Pain in the hands of God will be turned into beautiful things if we will let it. I had some surprising and absolutely beautiful moments while we were filming these teachings in Israel.

We started with a sunrise filming on the Arbel Cliffs, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. I visited the ancient Emmaus Road for the very first time and walked on it as we filmed. It's a portion of that ancient road that Jesus walked with two disappointed disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24). I have sat in many places where Jesus would've sat, but walking a road that resurrected Jesus walked just about did me in.

I could go on and on, but delight and joy and wonder found me during this filming project. I would not have experienced these things without first giving a submitted *yes* to it.

Sitting here writing this, I can actually say that this *Luke in the Land* study is given with my fully submitted and surrendered heart to you and yours. I hope you love getting to know Jesus better not only in His first-century Jewish world, but in the land of Israel where He lived, ministered, died, resurrected, and ascended.

Kristi McLelland 

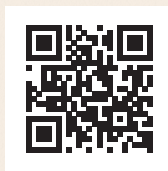
How to Use This Study



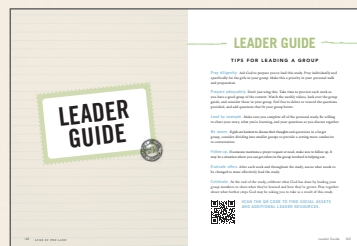
In our time together, we are going to glimpse some snapshots of the story of Jesus in the land where He walked. We are going to study God's Word in a way that might seem a bit different from what you've experienced in the past. The Gospel of Luke is written in a way similar to how you might journal or pick out photos for an album—one snapshot at a time. We'll be looking at four snapshots in the life of Jesus each session.

▶ LEADING A GROUP?

You can locate a **LEADER GUIDE** on page 142. The leader guide offers several tips and helps for each week. To find additional resources for leaders, visit lifeway.com/lukeintheland.

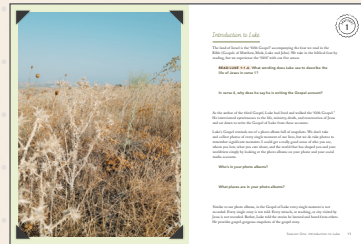


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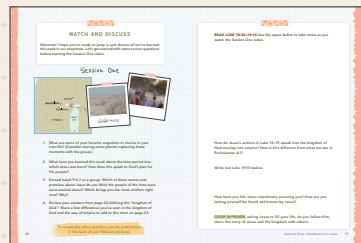


WHAT'S INSIDE

The **SNAPSHOT** sections are for your personal study time. Instead of labeling them by days of study, we've labeled them as snapshots, taking from the structure of the Gospel of Luke itself. Feel free to complete each between our weekly group times as you see fit throughout the week.



The **WATCH AND DISCUSS** times are meant to be completed with your small group. In the Middle Eastern way, the original context of the Gospel of Luke, learning is very communal. Here's what I mean: in a Middle Eastern context, it would be common to see rabbis teaching students as they walked down the road. This teaching tradition places significant value on students discussing an issue with one another.



You'll notice group discussion guides crafted especially for you to use as you yeshiva, or discuss biblical text together, after you've studied them throughout the week. You'll also find a place for you to take notes as you watch the week's teaching video.

VIDEO ACCESS: You'll find detailed information for how to access the video teaching sessions that accompany this study in the back of your Bible study book.

LOOKING FOR MORE? Watch the optional bonus video from Kristi, "The Making of Luke in the Land," available on the Lifeway On Demand app or lifeway.com/lukeintheland. In the video, Kristi shares a bit more of her heart behind the study and how God used the teaching in Israel in her own life.





Session One







Introduction to Luke

The land of Israel is often referred to as the “fifth Gospel” accompanying the four we read in the Bible (Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). We take in the biblical four by reading, but we experience the “fifth” with our five senses.

READ LUKE 1:1-4. What wording does Luke use to describe the life of Jesus in verse 1?

In verse 4, why does he say he is writing the Gospel account?

As the author of the third Gospel, Luke had lived and walked the “fifth Gospel.” He interviewed eyewitnesses to the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus and sat down to write the Gospel of Luke from these accounts.

Luke’s Gospel reminds me of a photo album full of snapshots. We don’t take and collect photos of every single moment of our lives, but we do take photos to remember significant moments. I could get a really good sense of who you are, whom you love, what you care about, and the world that has shaped you and your worldview simply by looking at the photo albums on your phone and your social media accounts.

Who’s in your photo albums?

What places are in your photo albums?

Similar to our photo albums, in the Gospel of Luke every single moment is not recorded. Every single story is not told. Every miracle, or teaching, or city visited by Jesus is not recorded. Rather, Luke told the stories he learned and heard from others. He provides gospel-gorgeous snapshots of the gospel story.

The full testimony of Jesus could never be fully captured in human words in any one Gospel account. The very last verse of the very last Gospel, John's Gospel, ends with this truth.

Jesus did many other things as well.
If every one of them were written down,
I suppose that even the whole world would
not have room for the books that would be written.

JOHN 21:25

**Have you ever thought of the Bible and the Gospels in this way?
What are some of your favorite "snapshots" from Scripture? From
Jesus's life?**

We are a people who are meant to experience Jesus. The four written Gospels and the "fifth Gospel" of the land of Israel invite us to experience Jesus and to understand Him in His first-century world—His life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection—so that we might follow Him, being like Him in our own world.

LUKE: BACKGROUND & STORY-TELLING

Luke's Gospel is the third of four Gospels located in the canon of the New Testament. However, originally it was seen as part one of a two-volume work that included the book of Acts.¹ It's easy to miss this because the placement of John's Gospel as the fourth separates Luke's Gospel account from his writings that follow in Acts. The earliest readers of the text would have read Luke and Acts as one continuous story. What began in Luke would see fulfillment throughout Acts and on and on until this very moment you and I find ourselves in. We too are part of this story.

The original work, known as Luke-Acts, makes up approximately one-fourth of the entire New Testament!² We don't often think of Luke as one of the biggest contributors to the New Testament writings, but with twenty-four chapters in Luke and twenty-eight chapters in Acts, his literary contribution is a substantial gift to us who feast on the life, ministry, stories, and kingdom work of Jesus and His earliest disciples.

The Gospels and Acts are first-century teaching documents, rather than personal correspondence like much of the rest of the New Testament. As such, these texts do not provide Luke's name as the author. However, reliable early Christian sources, such as the M. Canon (AD 170) and writings from Irenaeus (AD 180), confirm Luke as the writer of Luke-Acts.³

What do you know about Luke, the person?

READ COLOSSIANS 4:14; 2 TIMOTHY 4:9-11; AND PHILEMON 23-24. What do you learn about Luke?

Luke was most likely a Gentile physician, well-versed in Greek culture and language, a follower of Jesus, and a companion of Paul on some of his missionary journeys and adventures. Paul refers to him as “dear friend Luke, the doctor” (Col. 4:14) and as a “fellow worker” (Philem. 24).

While Luke is not specifically mentioned as the author of Luke-Acts, one unique feature of Luke's Gospel is that it is the only one that names its recipient—“most excellent Theophilus,” and “Theophilus” (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Theophilus means “beloved by God.” The phrase “most excellent” indicates that he was most likely a person of high social rank and financial status. We see this term used of other high ranking people in the book of Acts (23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Theophilus was most likely the literary patron who financially provided for the copying of these Luke-Acts scrolls for himself and others.⁴

It is beautiful to imagine Luke, some two thousand years ago, writing the third Gospel as he walked the “fifth Gospel,” interviewing eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus and the early church and scribing these stories as the Holy Spirit led him (Luke 1:1-4). In Acts 27:1 and Acts 28:1, Luke used the word *we*, indicating that he was with Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea during that two-and-a-half-year time frame. This would have most likely been the time Luke interviewed his eyewitnesses and wrote his Gospel account, even as he was walking, embodying, seeing, and experiencing the land of Israel for himself.⁵



Historical Context

In the time of Herod the king of Judea . . .

LUKE 1:5a

In those days Caesar Augustus . . .

LUKE 2:1a

Have you ever thought about the timing of Jesus's birth into the world? Every Christmas season we celebrate His birth, the beautiful story told in Matthew 1–2 and Luke 2—when the living God took on flesh and broke into human history, changing it forever. What was the world Jesus was born into like, and what can we learn about Him from both the timing and the context of His arrival on earth?

CONTEXT

The Bible tells an ongoing story about the people of Israel and the people groups and nations they interacted with. The Israelites were often subjected to foreign rule and oppression—empires that came and went, taking everything they could along the way. The list goes something like this: Egypt (Ex.), Assyria (2 Kings 17), Babylon (Dan.), Persia (Esth., Neh.), Greece (Intertestamental Period), and Rome (New Testament).

Within these difficult stories of harsh domination by cruel pharaohs, kings, and caesars, there are stories of light in the darkness, hope in the midst of despair, and salvation and deliverance. These biblical stories teach us to look for light in our own darkness, to reach for hope in our own despair, and to courageously cry out for salvation and deliverance in our own lives.

The overarching narrative of the Bible is centered around those who are on the bottom of society's hierarchies and structures. Jesus, the King of kings, came all the way to the lowest circle of humanity, found the lost, the sick, and the marginalized, and prioritized them.

LOOK UP LUKE 4:18-21 AND LUKE 19:10. What does this tell you about Jesus's mission on earth?

No "king" had ever done this in human history.

Between the Old Testament and New Testament, there was a time period called the Intertestamental Period. It covered approximately four hundred years between Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, and Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. Significant changes impacted the whole world during this time. Those changes came when the Greeks, through Alexander the Great, emerged as the ruling superpower on the earth.

As we move closer to the world at the time of Jesus's birth, we come to a very important date during the Intertestamental Period, one that set the stage for the context of the Gospels in the New Testament.

In 63 BC, a Roman general named Pompey conquered Judea and Jerusalem, like others who had come before him. He laid siege to Jerusalem and eventually broke into the city. Twelve thousand Jewish people died in Jerusalem that day.

But Pompey took it one step further. Ancient Jewish historian Josephus reported that Pompey entered the temple, even entered as far as the Holy of Holies—something the high priest of Israel did only once a year on the Day of Atonement.⁶ His actions served as a sign of what life under Roman rule would look like for years to come.

* The Alexander Mosaic is a Roman floor mosaic originally from the House of the Faun in Pompeii.



* Tetradrachm of Alexander the Great

READ ABOUT THE DAY OF ATONEMENT IN LEVITICUS 16:2-4.

How does this passage inform on the inappropriateness of Pompey's actions?

TIMING

Julius Caesar, another formidable Roman general and statesman, defeated Pompey in 48 BC, and declared himself as the dictator of Rome for life.⁷ Before he was famously assassinated in 44 BC, he was deified as a god. Later, as Rome transitioned from a republic to an empire in 27 BC, Caesar's adopted son, Gaius Octavian, secured sole rulership as the first true emperor, or Caesar, of the Roman Empire. The Senate conferred the name "Augustus" or "revered one" on him and he was known as Caesar Augustus.⁸



* Caesar Augustus

Believed to have divine origins, Augustus was identified by the Latin phrase *divi filius*, or "son of god."⁹ It was this Caesar who was enthroned in imperial Rome when Jesus, the true Son of God, was birthed in lowly Bethlehem. These names and events start to bring the timing of Jesus's earthly arrival into focus. When man became a god, God became a man.

Caesar Augustus ruthlessly squashed civil wars within the empire and established the *Pax Romana*—"Roman peace." Unlike the peace associated with Hebrew *shalom*—lovely, calm, and universally beneficial peace—this Roman peace held more oppressive connotations. This was a "peace" maintained at all costs by the heavy hand of Rome. It benefited those on top and in power at the expense of those below and on the margins of society.¹⁰

While Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire and the world, Herod the Great was installed as a local king in Judea—the king of the Jews. As a personal friend of the famed couple Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII of Egypt, Herod governed at the time of Jesus's birth.

However, he served as more of a puppet king, installed by the Romans to keep the peace in the seemingly insignificant Judean outpost.¹¹

Herod was a paranoid, murderous ruler. He built magnificent structures, and even cities like Caesarea Maritima, while he was mistrusted and even hated by his Jewish subjects. Herod had no fewer than three of his own sons killed, as well as his most beloved wife, Mariamne, a Hasmonean princess. Caesar Augustus was thought to have said of Herod that it was “safer to be Herod’s pig (*hus*) than his son (*huios*).”¹² Knowing this, we are not surprised at the Massacre of the Innocents, an incident recorded in Matthew 2:16-18, when Herod ordered all boys aged two and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem to be murdered.

Whenever I think about the world Jesus was born into, I think about the familiar Christmas carol “O Holy Night.” The lyrics speak to the first Christmas as well as to ours, two thousand years later.

Long lay the world
in sin and error pining.

Til he appeared
and the soul felt its worth.¹³

O HOLY NIGHT



* Aerial view of Caesarea with its ruins and antiquities. In the middle is the hippodrome where horse chariot races took place.



* Caesarea as it appears today



Good News for All People

The world was dark indeed during this time in human history. It is interesting to me that Luke uses the word and concept of a *soter*—or “savior”—throughout his Gospel.¹⁴

Look up the times Luke uses the word *savior* and take note of the context each time. Who is using the word? What were the circumstances?

Luke 1:47

Luke 2:11

While all the Gospels speak to Jesus as Savior, Matthew and Mark do not use the word *soter*, and John uses it only once. Luke is emphasizing this “Savior” coming into this world. His Gospel tells the story of the Son of God being born *while* the Roman “son of god,” Augustus, was in power.

Jesus was born right under the nose of Herod the Great and within the Roman Empire of Caesar Augustus. A Judean king and a Caesar of empire ruled while the Light of the world was coming into the world to be the Savior. Jesus would show that there is another way to order the world than the way of empire—the powerful

lording over the powerless. Jesus would show the way of the kingdom of God right in the midst of empire. He would bring a gospel, good news for ALL people, not only for the few at the top.

The angels embodied this very reality when they served as divine heralds to Bethlehem shepherds. The good news was prioritized and given first to shepherds who were lowly and believed to be on the margins in their own culture. This “good news” was good news even for shepherds.

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

LUKE 2:10-11

READ LUKE 22:25-26. Given the historical and cultural context you read in today’s study, why was this statement especially radical? Would such a statement be radical in our current context? Why or why not?

KINGDOM VERSUS EMPIRE

Jesus’s central teaching was the Sermon on the Mount, located in Matthew 5–7 and Luke 6:17-49. This is His longest recorded teaching in the Bible. Throughout both the Sermon on the Mount and in His teaching and ministry as a Rabbi of Israel, He continually proclaimed one theme. What was that theme?

LOOK UP MATTHEW 4:17,23-25; LUKE 4:43; LUKE 10:1-9; AND ACTS 1:1-3. What was Jesus proclaiming in all these verses?

Jesus spoke over and over again about the kingdom of God.

The *kingdom of God* or the *kingdom of heaven*—the two terms are interchangeable and mean the same thing. *Heaven* is something of an idiom for *God* to the Jewish people. Devout Jews do not speak the Divine Name of God that was spoken to Moses at the burning bush—*YHWH* (yud-heh-vav-heh in Hebrew). *HaShem* (The Name) is a common name used by devout Jews to say the name of the Lord. “Kingdom of heaven” is a way of saying “kingdom of God” without saying His Name.

In Hebrew, it is called the *malkhut shamayim*. Dr. Dwight A. Pryor explains that the phrase is a “verbal noun,” meaning that it speaks of a present reality, not a future hope.¹⁵

What do you think the “kingdom of God” means?

Simply put, the *kingdom of God* is God’s reign over the universe. He is sovereign and has dominion over everything in and under heaven. Jesus’s world in Luke, and our world today, was and is anchored in the way of the empire. We are striving orphans, starving and trying to acquire more and more and more. Jesus breaks in with a different way—the way of the kingdom.

Fill in the chart below with some examples of how the kingdom of God differs from the way of the empire. (I've included one to get you started.) As you continue your study of Luke, revisit this chart and add to it as a reminder of how Jesus brought in a radical new way.

| KINGDOM | EMPIRE |
|--------------|----------|
| Sabbath/Rest | Striving |

This concept of interrupting the way of the empire was central to Jesus's teaching, so we'll keep encountering it as we walk through the land and through Luke's Gospel. We'll fill out this chart together as we go to learn more of what Jesus's heart and head and hands were working toward in His ministry on earth. You'll see how radical it was—and how radical it still is—to live the kingdom life in the world of the empire.

* Church of the Nativity,
Bethlehem, Israel



Advent

Advent is my absolute favorite time of year. It's the first season of the Christian calendar and covers the four Sundays preceding Christmas Day. Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “arrival” or “coming.”¹⁶ It remembers and celebrates Jesus's first advent (birth), and it anticipates His second advent, the second coming of Christ.

As part of the New Testament church, we hold the privilege of all people in human history to live sandwiched between Jesus's two comings. We have the testimony of the four Gospels behind us as we look to the promised second coming in front of us. The Gospels of both Matthew and Luke include Advent—the birth story of Jesus and accounts of His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph.

Jesus's advent was different from the arrival of other kings throughout human history. Kings typically came and conquered. They entered cities with swords and armies. They brought imprisonment, subjugation, harsh taxation, and ruled with heavy hands and fists. They ruled from the top down, with power centralized at the top and everyone below used up for imperial expansion and progression.

Jesus's advent brought the beginning of a new way to order the world. His arrival ignited a gospel (good news) that would indeed be good news for ALL people. Jesus's advent ushered into the world the beginnings of a true peace, an ancient *shalom* that was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah.

READ ISAIAH 9:6-7. Which of these names and promises about Jesus do you think the people of the time were most excited about? What do you think they were looking for in the promised Messiah?

Which of the promises about the Messiah from Isaiah 9:6-7 brings you the most comfort?

This child was indeed born in Bethlehem in Judea, was raised in Nazareth, and lived as a grown man and Rabbi of Israel in Capernaum, in the district of Galilee. But what did Jesus advent (or come) into the world to do? He answered this question in both word and deed throughout the four Gospels—with the Gospel of Luke being our focus in this biblical feast.

For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

LUKE 19:10

Jesus came for lost humanity—to save us and bring us home. Have you ever been lost? The only thing worse than being lost is being lost and knowing that no one is coming for you.

Have you ever been lost and unable to call for help? How did you feel when you realized you were lost?

As far back as Genesis 3, God has been about seeking and saving the lost.

READ GENESIS 3:8-10. Who asked the question in these verses?

The first question the Lord ever asked in the Bible was in the garden of Eden after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Cloaked in shame, they had hidden themselves among the trees when they heard the Lord walking through the garden in the cool of the day.

LOOK AT GENESIS 3:8-10 AGAIN. What was the first question God asked of man?

These three words in English are one word in Hebrew—*ayeka*.¹⁷

When you read this, how do you imagine hearing the tone in His voice? In your imagination, does He sound angry? Disappointed? Sad? Frantic?

Why do you imagine His voice and tone sounding that way?

I often imagine His voice sounding something like a mixture of sadness and hope. Sad because they had broken *shalom*. Hopeful because He knew He could cover their shame (and He did, with animal skins). He was looking for them—not to kill them, but to save them. The Lord was looking to enter into their heartbreak so that He could begin the work of restoration.

The prophet Isaiah gave us this jewel about the living God's posture and movement toward us as lost humanity:

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you;
therefore he will rise up to show you compassion.

ISAIAH 30:18a

What makes the living God rise up? What makes Him come close?

The word compassion is a fusion of two words—*com* (with) and *pathos* (pain). Compassion is not so much an emotion that we feel. Compassion is a location—we are compassionate when we locate ourselves with someone in his or her pain. The Lord looked for Adam and Eve in the garden to meet them in their pain. Most of all, I imagine *ayeka* with a tone of compassion.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, we will see Jesus practicing compassion—locating Himself with people right in the middle of their pain. He sought out and found the lost and offered to bring them home. He does the same today. Jesus is not afraid of our sin or our pain; He meets us there and offers to bring us home.

We may feel lost from time to time, but we are never lost with no one coming for us. Rather, the living God still asks, *ayeka*, “Where are you?” We can afford to cry out, to wait on the Lord, to endure the present pain and trial. He is the one who advents, or comes, for us. Let us be found by Him anew today, right where we are.



What would it look like for you to invite God to be with you in your pain today?

Take a moment and praise God for His presence. Ask to feel His presence and compassion in your pain, or ask for His presence to be felt in the life of a loved one who is experiencing pain right now.



WATCH AND DISCUSS

Welcome! I hope you're ready to jump in and discuss all we've learned this week in our snapshots. Let's get started with some review questions before watching the Session One video.

Session One



1. What are some of your favorite snapshots or stories from your own life? (Consider sharing some photos capturing these moments with the group.)
2. What have you learned this week about the time period into which Jesus was born? How does this speak to God's plan for His people?
3. **READ ISAIAH 9:6-7.** Which of these names and promises about Jesus do you think the people of the time were most excited about? Which brings you the most comfort right now? Why?
4. Review your answers from page 22 defining the "kingdom of God." Share a few differences you've seen in the kingdom of God and the way of empire to add to the chart on page 23.

To access the video sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.



READ LUKE 18:35–19:10. Use the space below to take notes as you watch the Session One video.

How do Jesus's actions in Luke 18–19 speak into the kingdom of God moving into empire? How is this different from what we see in Ecclesiastes 4:1?

Write out Luke 19:10 below.

How have you felt Jesus relentlessly pursuing you? How are you letting yourself be found and known by Jesus?

CLOSE IN PRAYER, asking Jesus to fill your heart. As you follow Him, share the story of Jesus and His kingdom with others.