



PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

LUKE 9-12



Following Jesus



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BY GORDON CHENG



matthiasmedia

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Pathway Bible Guides: Luke 9-12

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

It may seem a strange place to launch a new Bible study—right in the middle of Luke’s Gospel.

It’s where the disciples finally work out that Jesus is no ordinary man. In Luke 9, Peter confesses that Jesus is “the Christ of God”, the king that God has chosen to lead his people and rule his heavenly kingdom. It’s exactly what anyone needs to realize before they can become a follower of Jesus. And in Luke’s Gospel, the section that follows (from chapter 9 onwards) is all about what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

So this is a brilliant part of the Gospel to begin with if, like Peter, we have realized that Jesus must be our king, and we want to know what happens next.

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? Will we be powerful like him? Will we be rich? What’s this about needing to ‘take up our cross’? Once we decide Jesus is king, will we have to tell others?

And what about other parts of the Christian life? Christians are supposed to do good works, but what good works? Isn’t Christianity just about trusting Jesus, and *not* about good works? What about prayer, money, and religious activity—where do they fit?

So then, this guide has two aims.

Firstly, the idea is to read this section of Luke’s Gospel and be challenged to trust Jesus, and to see what that means for our lives and atti-

tudes, including such important areas as prayer, wealth, and success.

Secondly, the plan is to provide a simple model of how to read the Bible for ourselves in a small group.

To help meet the second aim, each session begins with a brief discussion starter to help break the ice, and then dives straight into the Bible with questions about what the passage says. These opening questions usually have obvious and short answers straight out of the passage. After this, the questions deal more with what the passage means and how it applies.

The accompanying *Leader's Notes* (produced in a separate booklet) give hints, tips and suggested answers, as well as background information and other passages to consult. However, the main idea is to stay with the passage in Luke that is set down—on the assumption that this particular part of God's word has something to say, and we ought to pay attention to what is in front of us.

The best way to use this guide is to read the set passage for yourself, and answer the questions briefly in your own time before you come to the group. When you then discuss your answers in the group, the work you've done by yourself will be a great help to yourself and to the other group members.

My prayer is that this guide to chapters 9 to 12 of Luke's Gospel will help us see Jesus more clearly and so trust him more firmly.

Gordon Cheng

May 2004

1. THE TURNING POINT

(Luke 9:18-27)



Getting started

Pick one or more of the options below. Jesus being 'king' or 'lord' (that is, the boss) means:

- He can do whatever miracle he wants.
- He can say whatever he wants, and it will happen.
- His closest followers will share his power.
- Christians everywhere can share his power, if they have faith.
- Christians can do Jesus' miracles, if they have faith.

Why did you pick your answer(s)?



Light from the Word

Read Luke 9:18-27.

1. In Luke 9:20, Peter says that Jesus is “the Christ of God” (“Christ” means king, lord or boss). In other words, Peter is saying that Jesus has enormous power and authority. If you were one of the disciples, what do you think Jesus might now predict:
 - a. for himself?
 - b. for anyone who follows him?
2. What does Jesus *actually* predict for himself (Luke 9:22)? (Note: ‘the Son of Man’ is Jesus’ normal way of talking about himself.)
3. Can you think of any good reason why he doesn’t want the disciples to tell people about him (Luke 9:21)?

4. What does Jesus promise for anyone who follows him (Luke 9:23-27)?

(How does this compare with your answer to question 1b above?)

5. Look again at Luke 9:23.

a. What three things does someone have to do if they are going to follow Jesus?

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- b. What do you think it means to ‘take up your cross daily’ (verses 24-26 will be helpful in answering this)?
- c. What will happen if we:
- follow Jesus?

 - don’t follow Jesus?
6. If you have made the decision to follow Jesus, share in the group how the decision came about.
7. Think about the different areas of your life where you have to make the small daily decisions to ‘deny yourself’ and follow Jesus. Share in the group the areas that you find most difficult:
- a. at home

 - b. at work

c. at church

d. in any other part of life



To finish

Pick one point that you think is particularly important. How would you explain this point to a clever six-year-old?



Pray

Pray for each other about the things you shared in question 7: those areas in which you struggle to follow Jesus each day.

FOR THE LEADER

What are Pathway Bible Guides?

Following Jesus is the first in our new series of Pathway Bible Guides. This new series aims to provide simple, straightforward Bible study material for:

- Christians who are new to studying the Bible (perhaps because they've been recently converted or because they have joined a Bible study group for the first time);
- Christians with lower literacy levels who find other studies¹ too much of a stretch.

Accordingly, we've designed the studies to be short, straightforward and easy to use, with an uncomplicated vocabulary. At the same time, we've tried to do justice to the passages being studied, and to model good Bible-reading principles. We've tried to be simple without being simplistic; no-nonsense without being no-content.

The questions and answers assume a small group context, but it should be easy to adapt them to suit different situations, such as individual study and one-to-one.

Your role as leader

Because many in your group may not be used to reading and discussing a Bible passage in a group context, a greater level of responsibility will fall to you as the leader of the discussions. There are the usual responsibilities of preparation, prayer and managing group dynamics.

1. Such as the Interactive Bible Study (IBS) series also available from Matthias Media.

Then, in addition, there will be an extra dimension of forming and encouraging good Bible reading habits in people who may not have much of an idea of what those habits look like.

Questions have been kept deliberately brief and simple. For that reason, you may have to fill in some of the gaps that may have been addressed in, say, an Interactive Bible Study. Such ‘filling in’ may take the form of asking follow-up questions, or using your best judgement to work out when you might need to supply background information. That sort of information, and some suggestions about other questions you could ask, may be found in the following *Leader’s Notes*. In addition, a *New Bible Dictionary* is always a useful aid to preparation, and simple commentaries such as those in the *Tyndale* or *Bible Speaks Today* series are often helpful. Consult them after you have done your own preparation.

On the question of background information, these studies are written from the assumption that God’s word stands alone. God works through his Holy Spirit and the leaders he has gifted—such as you—to make his meaning clear. Assuming this to be true, the best interpreter and provider of background information for Scripture will not be academic historical research, but Scripture itself. We know for instance that Jews and Samaritans hated each other not simply through historical research, but by reflecting carefully and thoughtfully on passages like 2 Kings 17:29, Ezra 4:10 and Nehemiah 4:2. Extra historical information may be useful for the purpose of illustration, but it is unnecessary for understanding and applying what God says to us.

The format of the studies

The discussion questions on each passage follow a simple pattern. There is a question at the beginning of each discussion that is simply intended to get people talking around the issues raised by the passage, and to give you some idea of how people are thinking. If the group turns out to be confident, motivated and comfortable with each other and the task at hand, you may even decide to skip this question. Alternatively, if the group members are shy or quiet, you may decide to think of related types of questions that you could add in to the study,

so as to maintain momentum in a non-threatening way.

After the first question, the remaining questions work through the passage sequentially, alternating between observation, interpretation and application in a way that will become obvious when you do your own preparation. The final question of each discussion, just before the opportunity for prayer, could be used in some groups to encourage (say) one person each week to give a short talk (it could be 1 minute or 5 minutes, depending on the topic, and the people). The thinking here is that there’s no better way to encourage understanding of a passage than to get people to the point where they can explain it to others. Use your judgement in making best use of this final exercise each week, depending on the people in your group.

In an average group, it should be possible to work through the study in approximately 45 minutes. But it’s important that you work out, as quickly as possible, what your group is capable of given the time available, and make adjustments accordingly. Work out in advance which questions or sub-points can be omitted if time is short. And have a few supplementary questions or discussion starters up your sleeve if your group is dealing with the material quite quickly and hungering for more. Each group is different. It’s your job as leader to use the printed material as ‘Bible Guides’ not as a set of questions that you must rigidly stick to, regardless of your circumstances.

Preparation

Ideally speaking, you will be encouraging group members to spend half an hour pencilling in answers to the questions in the guide before coming to the group. Likewise you will be putting in preparation time of roughly two hours for each study.

Read the passage more than once, and well ahead of time. You could even begin on the morning after the night of the previous discussion, when the context of the previous passage is fresh in your mind. Work through the questions for yourself before referring to the *Leader’s Notes*. Write whatever notes, supplementary questions and other information you need into your own copy of the Guide. Don’t bring along

your *Leader's Notes* to the group and read out the answers! And use the *Leader's Notes* as exactly that—as notes to help your preparation, and not as the Bible itself.

Finally, pray for yourself and the group members that you and they will respond rightly as the seed of the word of God is sown in people's hearts (Luke 8:4-15).

LEADER'S NOTES

1. THE TURNING POINT

(Luke 9:18-27)



Getting Started

21st century readers know the ending of the gospel story. As a result, we are often puzzled by the disciples' confusion about what will happen to Jesus. How could they possibly not understand that he is going to die, when he tells them so clearly that he will?

The only part of Jesus' words and actions that the disciples seem to understand correctly is his claim to be the Christ: the glorious eternal prophet, priest and king, who will rule God's people for all time from God's holy city, Jerusalem. It has taken a while—much teaching and many astonishing miracles—for them to come to this realization, and even now they are fuzzy about what it means. It certainly doesn't occur to the disciples that the king chosen by God might be harmed in any way, let alone be crucified as the worst sort of criminal.

This introductory question is meant to help group members understand how the disciples are thinking. Even though we may be surprised by the disciples' slowness to understand what is going on, their thinking is not too different from the way most people today might think when they imagine the great power associated with kings, presidents, prime ministers, dictators, and other rulers.

The more we understand the way the disciples are thinking, the more powerfully we are struck by the realization that Jesus' kingdom is not an earthly kingdom; it's a heavenly kingdom. The way Jesus achieves kingship in this heavenly kingdom is not by military conquest,

or by a devious political process, or by popular revolution. It is by giving his life as a sacrifice for the people who follow him.

If as a leader you can help the group to sympathize with the disciples' way of thinking, the final point will be all the clearer.



Light from the Word

1. What would Jesus predict?

a. For himself: You might expect that Jesus would predict a great victory. He would arrive at the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem, and be welcomed by all. The popular success he has enjoyed across Galilee would then translate into political power. If things continued to go well, the future would involve the removal of the Roman occupation forces and the successful re-establishment of the throne of David, as promised in 2 Samuel 7.

b. For anyone who follows him: You might expect Jesus to promise his followers that they would share in his kingly rule. This would surely be one of the first thoughts to occur to an ambitious follower after realizing the power that Jesus possessed. This is confirmed by two things: firstly, that Jesus immediately warns his followers not to think like this (Luke 9:23); secondly by the fact that they almost immediately do (Luke 9:43-48).

2. What does Jesus actually predict?

Jesus predicts something quite unbelievable to anyone who really accepts that he is a king. He predicts that he will be refused and rejected; so much so, that the representatives of the people he is to rule over will crucify him.

This isn't just hard for the disciples to accept as a political forecast. It's also a major theological problem for them. According to the Old Testament, the king is the righteous representative of God, who upholds the law of Moses (Deut 17:18-20). This same law says that "a hanged man is cursed by God" (Deut 21:23—crucifixion is a particularly humiliating form of hanging). So here's the problem: how can

God's lawkeeping king be cursed as a lawbreaker?

The fact that Jesus will die goes to the very heart of why he has come. In Luke 5:31 and Luke 19:10 his mission is made clear in his own words. He has come to heal spiritually sick people, that is, to find and save those who are spiritually lost in sin.

As the leader, you will want to provide some insight into this point without overwhelming group members with detail. It would be enough to point out that Jesus dies as a substitute, taking the punishment for the sins of all those who put their trust in him as their saviour and Lord. This is absolutely essential to his mission and kingship, since if he doesn't die, we can't be saved. Nor can we become followers of Jesus and members of his kingdom.¹

3. Why doesn't he want the disciples to tell people about him?

Jesus doesn't want to be misunderstood as a political figure or just a miracle worker, with the subsequent interference to his true mission. Is there a danger that this will happen? Yes, certainly. One example of this is in Luke 5:14-16. Here Jesus attempts to prevent the spread of a report of a particularly powerful healing. Even so, many people hear of what he is doing, with the immediate result that Jesus is forced to withdraw into 'desolate places' whenever he wishes to pray.

4. What does Jesus promise for anyone who follows ?

Jesus promises suffering in the short term, but life and heavenly glory in the long term. He expresses this positively, and then negatively, by pointing out that life and glory will be lost if the person is unwilling to take up their cross daily, or is ashamed of Jesus and his words (9:25-6).

Note the mention of being ashamed of **Jesus' words**. This comes directly after Jesus has just spoken of his suffering, rejection, death and resurrection. Those particular words, and the idea of suffering before glory, are emphasized both by frequent repetition of the prediction

1. Further information on how we see this in Luke's gospel can be found in session 4 of *Simply Christianity*, also available from Matthias Media.

(9:43-45, 13:33, 17:25, 18:31-3, 22:22) and by Luke's recording of how these things are then fulfilled (11:53-4, 16:14, 22:2, 22:52-3, 23:10-11, etc.)

In other words, Christians are not simply being called to follow after a particular moral code that Jesus wants to see upheld. What he really requires of us is trust in him, acceptance of his word, and a willingness to be identified with him in his suffering.

There is an opportunity here to ask whether this is what group members thought was on offer when they became Christians. Some churches would teach that we ought to become Christians because of the benefits available to us in this life. Here Jesus teaches that the Christian life is a life of suffering. Undoubtedly some earthly benefits exist (see Luke 18:29-30, for example). But to see them as the reason for becoming Christian is to miss the point entirely. Rather, we are encouraged to weigh the benefits of the life to come against the suffering of this life.

5. a. What three things does someone have to do:

The three things are (i) to deny self (ii) to take up our cross daily and (iii) to follow Jesus.

As with other comprehension questions, there is no need to spend a lot of time on this once the correct answer has been discovered in the passage.

b. What do you think it means to 'take up your cross daily'?

Taking up the cross daily refers not so much to the *big* decision to become a Christian, as to the many daily small decisions that will follow on from this. Of course, there is no area of life or decision-making that would be exempt if we call Jesus 'Lord'. But the areas particularly highlighted here are those that relate to personal gain, and whether or not we are willing to acknowledge Jesus publicly.

c. What will happen if we follow Jesus/don't follow Jesus?

This question can be answered straightforwardly from the passage. The experience of the Christian life could be summarised as 'suffering now, glory then'. The suffering comes as we make daily decisions that are either painful, or bad for our short-term interests:

resisting temptation, resisting the pressure that the world puts on us, ignoring and opposing the satanic pressure to disbelieve Jesus' words and promises. Chief among those pressures will be the pressure to deny the name of Christ either directly or by our silence and inaction (see question 6 for further application).

The glory is by and large hidden from our eyes in this life—although notice how immediately after Jesus issues this challenge, the disciples are given a glimpse of the glory in the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Because the glory is hidden from our eyes we can't speak of what it will be like in any detail. But at its heart will be the recognition given to us by the King of Kings, Jesus Christ, when he stands in the presence of his Father. As great a privilege as it is to know God, far greater is the privilege of being known and welcomed by him.

6. Share how you came to make the decision to follow Jesus.

Although the question assumes that group members will be Christian, this is one opportunity to discover whether this is really so. Do group members understand that although their decision and effort is called for, ultimately what saves them is the suffering and death of the Son of Man? The very language of salvation and rescue in this passage suggests our helplessness. If there is any confusion on this point, it would be worth returning to the earlier part of the study and explaining more carefully the reason why Jesus had to die.

7. Think and share about different areas of your life ...

There's plenty of room here for a wide-ranging discussion of peoples' struggles to follow Jesus. Encourage personal sharing by giving your own examples, listening carefully, and leaving plenty of time for responses.

There may be room for some helpful specific suggestions. For example, if people find it hard to own up to being Christians in the workplace, ask if they talk about going to church when the conversation turns to 'what I did on the weekend'. Or ask parents if they are praying with their children on a regular basis.

Having said this, one danger to watch out for is legalism. It's easy in

a discussion of personal sinfulness to find ourselves doing nothing more than giving advice on the how-tos of avoiding error. As helpful as specific suggestions may be, true change comes as we know and experience the grace of Christ. Therefore the focus of the answer should shift away from ourselves to the action and example of the Lord Jesus.



To finish

The idea of this exercise is to help group members crystallize what they have learnt, and there's no better way to do this than trying to explain it to someone else simply. Give the group a few minutes to think about it, and then, depending on how much time you have available, ask a few people to share their ideas.

This is not meant to be a high-pressure assignment. Keep it light-hearted. Emphasize that the point is to help them think about what they have learned.

If time is limited, you may only have time for one or two people to share. There are questions like this at the end of most of the other studies, so there will be plenty of opportunities for others to take a turn.



Pray

Make sure you build time for prayer into your planning. Base the prayer time on the key points that came from your Bible study together—especially the personal and practical concerns that may have emerged from questions 6 and 7.