

SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE



A Call to Make Your Life Count
in a World of Urgent Need

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID PLATT serves as the pastor of McLean Bible Church in metro Washington, D.C. He's the founder and president of Radical (Inc.), a global ministry and giving platform whose purpose is to serve the church and spread the gospel on the front lines of urgent need around the world. Resources from David Platt and Radical can be found at radical.net.

David is the author of several books, including *Radical*, *Radical Together*, *Follow Me*, *Counter Culture*, and *Something Needs to Change*, as well as the following volumes in the Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary series: *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, *Exalting Jesus in James*, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy* and *Titus*, and *Exalting Jesus in Galatians*.

David Platt received his PhD from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in the metro Washington, D.C., area with his wife and their children.

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago the Lord turned my life upside down on a trek through the Himalayan trails.

As a pastor, I travel overseas three or four times a year, and this trip started just like any other. I was taking a small group of other pastors with me to explore opportunities for ministry partnerships among men, women, and children in remote mountain regions. We flew to a major city, where we rested for a night, and then we boarded a helicopter that would take us twelve thousand feet higher than the rest of the world. We landed on a small plateau of land surrounded by majestic mountain-tops, stepped out of the helicopter with small bags on our backs, and began a trek out of the mountains that would take us six days to hike.

By the end of that adventure, I was sitting stunned in an airport, saying to the pastors around me, “I don’t know what all of this means, but I know this. Something needs to change. Something is going to change.” Little did I know what that change would mean for my life.

Now, a couple of years removed from that trek through those Himalayan trails, I don’t believe what I saw, smelled, felt, and experienced was just for me. And I don’t think that trip was intended to change the trajectory of my life alone. The questions I found myself wrestling with on those freezing nights in the mountains are questions I’m convinced we all need to wrestle with. Where is God amid suffering in this world? Why was I born into relative comfort, while so many men, women, and children are born into desperate poverty? Surely I have a responsibility to use the resources I have, but what am I supposed to do? What’s my duty in this world?

This Bible study isn’t simply an attempt to give you my answers to these questions. These are questions we all need to ask, and I hope this Bible-study experience will help you do that. I want to take readers on a journey with me through remote Himalayan trails to wrestle with realities we all need to wrestle with and to consider how these realities in the world around us, in light of God’s Word to us, need to shape our lives, our families, and our churches. I want to invite other followers of Jesus to come to the point where we say together, “Something needs to change. Something is going to change.”

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible-study book provides eight weeks of content for group and personal study.

GROUP SESSIONS

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each session of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members and with the truths of God's Word presented in this study.

START

This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video teaching.

DISCUSS

This page includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to David's video teaching and to explore relevant Bible passages.

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Each session includes a participant guide to help group members follow along with the video teaching. Additionally, the second page of the participant guide features action steps and questions designed to lead group members to think more deeply about what God is teaching them through this study.

PERSONAL STUDY

REFLECTIONS

Each session of personal study begins with an excerpt from the book *Something Needs to Change*, in which David reflects on his trip to the Himalayas.

PERSONAL STUDY

Each session provides three personal Bible studies, using the REAP method. Each personal study includes a passage from the Gospel of Luke, along with commentary and questions to help participants understand the Bible and apply its teaching to their lives.

THE REAP METHOD

Each session features three personal Bible studies, using the REAP method.

READ

Read the passage of Scripture asking the Holy Spirit to give you encouragement, direction, and correction (see 2 Tim. 3:16). Highlight verses and phrases that stand out to you as particularly important.

EXAMINE

Spend time reflecting on and writing about the Scriptures you've read. This section will help you respond to those Scriptures by thinking through the following questions.

- What's occurring in the passage?
- What's the big theme or takeaway from this passage?
- Why did the biblical author include this passage?
- What does this passage teach you about God? About people? About Jesus? About the necessity of faith? About the urgency of eternity?

APPLY

After examining the passage, apply the text to your life. The questions in this section will help you consider ways the Scripture you've read that day changes the way you live.

PRAY

Pray and ask God to change your heart and your life, based on your study of God's Word.



TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

Follow these guidelines to prepare for each group session.

PRAYERFULLY PREPARE

REVIEW. Review each session's material and group questions ahead of time.

PRAY. Intentionally pray for each person in the group.

Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus through God's Word.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

Create an environment that's conducive to small-group discussion. Plan ahead by considering details like seating, temperature, lighting, and general cleanliness.

At best, thoughtfulness and hospitality show guests and group members they're welcome and valued in whatever environment you choose to gather. Do everything in your ability to help people focus on what's most important: connecting with God, with the Bible, and with one another.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small-group experience has the following characteristics.

INCLUDE OTHERS. Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but are encouraged to grow spiritually. An inexpensive way to make first-time guests feel welcome or to invite someone to get involved is to give them their own copies of this Bible-study book.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER. Be sure that your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

DON'T RUSH THROUGH QUESTIONS. Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have had similar experiences or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're looking for only a certain answer.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust God's Word to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.

KEEP CONNECTING

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Participation during the group session always improves when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions. The more people are comfortable with and involved in one another's lives, the more they'll look forward to being together. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

PRAY FOR THE PEOPLES OF THE HIMALAYAS

In some parts of the world, following Jesus is a dangerous pursuit. The trek described in this Bible study details events seen and heard through multiple trips on Himalayan trails, where the gospel isn't always welcome. Everything and everyone described in this study is real, but for security reasons, key names, places, times, and other details have been altered to protect the people involved.

The people groups described here are emblematic of the people groups who live in the mountains.



GENERAL STATISTICS

The gospel has made very little progress in the Himalayas, not only because these people are hard to reach but also because these mountain ranges have historically been a stronghold of Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhism. Many important Buddhist monasteries and religious sites are located in the Himalayas.

Less than half of 1 percent of the villagers in the Himalayas know Jesus. Many have never even heard the name Jesus.

More than 98 percent of the inhabitants of the Himalayas would describe themselves as Buddhist. However, in addition to Buddhism, their religious beliefs contain a mixture of magic, divination, demon worship, and sacrifices.

Tibetan Buddhists are considered unreached. According to the Joshua Project, "An unreached or least-reached people is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside assistance."¹

Many dialects spoken by Tibetan Buddhists have access to a full translation of the Scriptures.

SPECIFIC PRAYERS

- Ask God to raise up committed teams of people to pray for the harvest in the Himalayas.
- Pray that God will raise up laborers for the harvest (see Luke 10:2).
- Ask God to encourage and protect the few known Christians in mountain villages.
- Pray that these believers will have opportunities to share Christ with their own people.
- Ask God to open the hearts of government leaders to allow Christians to gather for worship.
- Pray that God will turn Buddhists from the fear and bondage of their religion to salvation in Christ.
- Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches in the mountains.
- Ask that God will use this study to challenge believers to give their lives for the sake of His glory among all the peoples of the world.

1. Joshua Project, accessed July 9, 2019, <https://joshuaproject.net/help/definitions>.

SESSION

01

Repentance

START

**Welcome to session 1 of Something Needs to Change.
Use these questions to begin the conversation.**

Where's the farthest place you've ever traveled from home?

Have you ever gone on a mission trip to another country? What was that experience like?

Something Needs to Change follows Pastor David Platt on a journey through remote Himalayan villages. Of an estimated nine million people in the region where the videos for this Bible study were filmed, there are only one hundred followers of Jesus. Most people in this region have never heard the name of Jesus. Although it would be amazing for our group to go on the trek David took, the hope of this Bible study is to give us a glimpse into a region of the world filled with urgent physical and spiritual need. As we do, let's pray that the Spirit of God will challenge us and reveal areas of our lives that need to change.

Before we begin, have someone pray for our study, asking God to work and show us what needs to change in our own lives.

After praying watch the video, "Day 1: Repentance." Encourage group members to follow along, using the participant guide on pages 173-74 or at LifeWay.com/SomethingNeedstoChange.

To access video sessions, subscribe to SmallGroup.com or visit LifeWay.com/SomethingNeedstoChange.

DISCUSS

Use these questions to discuss the video teaching in your group.

David said every time he visits the region of the world featured in these videos, he's forced to ask hard questions. What kinds of experiences caused a similar paradigm shift in your life?

David mentioned that the Word of God shaped what he saw in the mountains. Why should we test our experience against the Word of God?

In His sovereignty God uses moments and experiences in our lives to shape us into the image of His Son. Visiting places outside our culture and comfort zone alerts us to physical and spiritual needs in a way few other experiences can. However, as helpful as those experiences are, all of our experiences must be tested by the Word of God.

Refer to Luke 3:1-18 for the following questions.

John the Baptist proclaimed a message of repentance (see v. 3). What does it mean to repent? Why is true repentance different from religious activity?

How do you typically respond to the needs you encounter in the world?

John prepared the way for Jesus by calling people to repent of their sin. Repentance is different from religious activity, which simply changes our behavior. Repentance results in a transformed heart, which changes our thoughts, motivations, and actions. John was calling the crowds to respond to God's grace with true, life-changing repentance (see vv. 11-14). Likewise, when confronted with needs, we can't do nothing.

Look again at verses 9 and 17. How did John describe the coming judgment of Christ? What does this kind of language teach us?

How does the reality of impending judgment increase the urgency to take the gospel to the ends of the earth?

The images of judgment in these passage are stark and visceral. John's metaphors highlight what's at stake in our mission to the world. The nine million people around the Himalayas and billions around the globe will one day stand before God as Judge. And the only way they can be saved on that day is through faith in Jesus, for through Jesus, the call to repent is also a message of hope.

Look again at verses 3-6. How does the world change when God's salvation spreads?

How have you seen the world change as people encounter and believe the gospel message?

Before John painted a picture of judgment, he offered promises of coming grace. In verses 4-6 we see a total reversal of the order of the world. The Lord is preparing a path for all people to know Him. As obstacles are removed, "everyone will see the salvation of God" (v. 6). As the gospel moves forward, the world changes, across the street and around the world.

PRAYER

God, thank You for saving us and calling us to live for the spread of Your gospel and glory in the world. Help us identify specific areas into which You're calling us. Lead us to be open to Your calling in our lives.

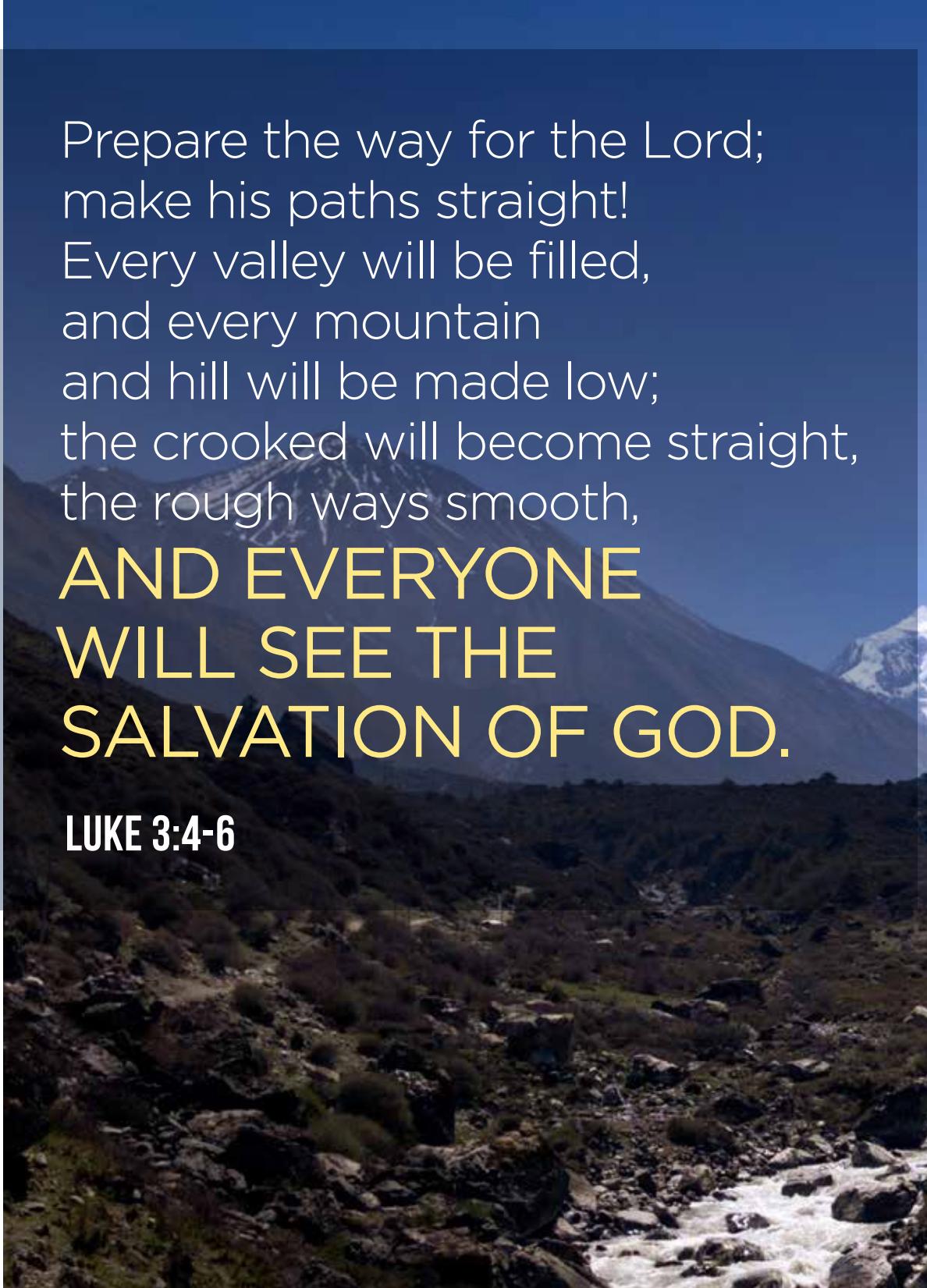
As you close, remind the group to complete the three personal studies that follow. Encourage them to spend time thinking about the suggestions for getting involved, located on the back of the participant guide.



Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!
Every valley will be filled,
and every mountain
and hill will be made low;
the crooked will become straight,
the rough ways smooth,

**AND EVERYONE
WILL SEE THE
SALVATION OF GOD.**

LUKE 3:4-6





REFLECTIONS



Excited but Tired

Thirty hours in coach on an airplane to the Himalayas wears you out.

We gather our carry-ons, and as we exit the jetway, new sights, smells, and sounds bombard our senses. Almost everyone around us is speaking a different language. Many of the women are wearing long, casual, colorful outfits with a head covering. Some of the men sport long, baggy, double-breasted shirts over matching pants. The airport restaurants give off a uniquely pungent aroma of spice and seasoning. Although we're exhausted, we quickly realize we're not in Kansas anymore.

Somewhat disoriented anyway, we feel our anxiety rise because we're not certain what to do or where to go. The airport signs are puzzling, written in another language and sometimes translated into English in ways that don't quite make sense.

When in doubt, go with the herd, so we hoist our packs and follow our fellow passengers toward customs. With groans we see a long line that's scarcely moving. As we creep along, we exchange glances of frustration. There's nothing to do but stand and shuffle.

After an hour-long wait, which provides us with plenty of time to stretch our legs, we hand our passports to an agent, who glances at each of our photos and then at our faces before verifying the validity of our visas.

"Why are you visiting our country"? he asks.

"We want to trek through the mountains," I answer.

He nods, stamps each passport, and waves us through.

Because we're carrying everything we need in our backpacks, there's no other baggage to retrieve.

Our friend Aaron picks us up, and we make our way to the guesthouse where we'll be staying for the night. In this large Asian city, even though it's several hours after sundown, the streets are clogged with traffic—every imaginable type of two-, three-, and four-wheeled vehicle, from pedal bikes to rickshaws to scooters to cars to buses to semitrucks. Chaos!

I notice my eyes slightly stinging from the pollution, with clouds of exhaust and dust rising from semipaved streets. Some of the residents riding two-wheelers are wearing surgical masks to screen out some of the dirty air. After an hour in the hectic traffic, we arrive at the guesthouse—ah, at last an opportunity to stretch out and sleep.

I make my way to my guesthouse room, a quaint setup with a single bed and a side table. A small window opens to the outside, letting a cool breeze gently blow into the room. With the soft wind comes steady noise from the street as men and women, cars and motorcycles continue in what seems like never-ending activity.

I began writing reflections on what God was teaching me in His Word. ... Those reflections would inevitably turn into prayers of praise and thanks to Him, petitions for my life, and intercession for others.

As I climb into bed, I pull my journal from my pack. When I was younger, a mentor encouraged me to journal my experiences with God. I began writing reflections on what God was teaching me in His Word and on ways I saw Him working in my life and in the world around me. Those reflections would inevitably turn into prayers of praise and thanks to Him, petitions for my life, and intercession for others. I can't say I've journaled every day since that time, but I've done so off and on for many years and almost every day in recent years. Even though I can barely hold my eyes open, I know I must write about this experience.



PERSONAL STUDY 1

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

All life change begins with God's Word. The single most important habit a Christian can develop is regularly feasting on the Scriptures. Throughout this study we'll work through the Gospel of Luke. In the Scriptures you see God's character revealed through His Word and His Son. As you encounter the living God, you begin to see what needs to change in your life.

■ THE AUTHOR

LUKE

Luke was a doctor, researcher, and companion of Paul. He was the author of the two volumes of Luke and Acts, which tell the story of Jesus and the early church. He was likely a Gentile.

■ PURPOSE

The Gospel of Luke is a carefully researched (see 1:3), selective presentation of the person and life of Jesus Christ, designed to strengthen the faith of believers (see 1:3-4) and to challenge the misconceptions of unbelievers, especially those from a Greek background. Its portrait of Jesus is well balanced, skillfully emphasizing His divinity and perfect humanity.

Three important themes in Luke's Gospel are the prayers of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit, and God's concern for the oppressed and the nations.

READ

Slowly and intentionally read the Scriptures.

READ LUKE 1:1-4.

LUKE 1:1-4

1 Many have undertaken to **compile a narrative** about the events that have been fulfilled among us,² just as the original **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word handed them down to us.³ It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus,⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

■ COMPILE A NARRATIVE [V. 1]

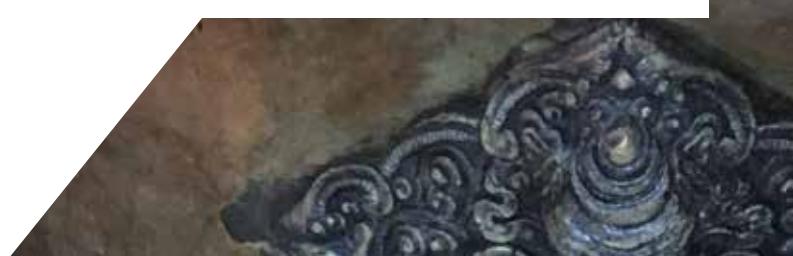
One reason we know we can trust the Bible is the authenticity of the record. For example, Luke tells us he took the time to carefully interview many eyewitnesses of the life and ministry of Jesus.

When we pick up Luke's Gospel, we're reading a thorough account of Jesus' life that was researched and fact-checked, so to speak. We can trust what we read.

■ WORD STUDY

EYEWITNESSES [V. 2]

Verse 2 refers to eyewitnesses, an important concept for our understanding of Luke. The doctor took great care to compile a narrative of the life of Jesus Christ by interviewing eyewitnesses. The Gospel of Luke is a product of careful investigation. Luke's account is thoughtful and intentional, containing much original material not found in the other Gospel accounts.



EXAMINE

Gain a deeper appreciation for what the biblical text says.

Take a few moments to read Luke 1:1-4 again, circling all of the words Luke used to describe his Gospel.

LUKE 1:1-4

1 Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us,² just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us.³ It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus,⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

Why do these words seem particularly important? What was important to Luke in capturing the life of Jesus?

In verse 4 Luke said he wanted Theophilus, the recipient of Luke's writing, to have certainty. How do the Scriptures provide us with certainty?

Why is it important for us to be able to believe in the reliability of Scripture?

APPLY

Recognize that the Bible calls us to obedience and to respond to God with our lives.

Luke understood that the story of Jesus was so important that he had to share it. Do you feel an urgency to share the gospel with others? Why or why not?

Identify some barriers that keep you from sharing the gospel with others.

PRAY

Respond to God with praise, thanksgiving, confession, and obedience.

Record a prayer to God in light of today's reading. Begin by asking Him to give you a desire to share His Word among all nations.

PERSONAL STUDY 2

READ

Slowly and intentionally read the Scriptures.

READ LUKE 2:8-20.

Today we'll look at a passage of Scripture that's most often considered at Christmas. It's one of the most popular and memorable passages in Scripture for good reason: it's a great story. However, it's so much more. The shepherds' encounter with the angel has much to teach us about God's character and mission to the nations.

LUKE 2:8-11

⁸ In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹ Today in the city of David a **Savior** was born for you, who is the **Messiah**, the **Lord**.

■ TITLES OF JESUS [V. 11]

The angel of the Lord announced, "A Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (v. 11). These three titles, which appear together nowhere else in Scripture, aren't incidental. They point to Jesus' identity.

JESUS IS SAVIOR

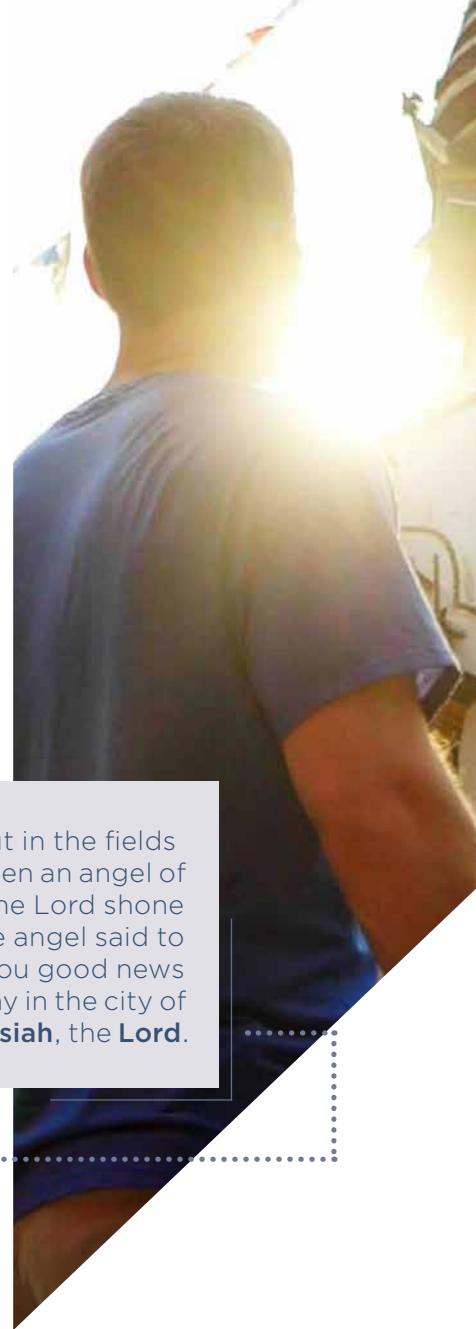
The one true God had broken into history to save His people from their sin. A Savior had been born. Jesus alone can save people from their sin. The rescue Luke wrote about has physical and spiritual dimensions.

JESUS IS MESSIAH

Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew term *Messiah*, meaning "Anointed One." Jesus isn't a Deliverer; He's the Deliverer. He alone is the promised Anointed One.

JESUS IS LORD

The term *Lord* is used to describe Yahweh in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. This title refers to the absolute sovereignty Jesus possesses as the One who brings salvation.



■ NOTICE THE RESPONSES [VV. 15, 19]

Pay close attention to the shepherds' and Mary's responses. The shepherds ran to tell the news. Mary turned over the thoughts in her heart, holding on to them for further contemplation. These verses make clear that Jesus demands a response. Both responses in this passage are correct; we're called to do both. The news that Jesus is Savior, Messiah, and Lord is to be shared and treasured. What we can't do is nothing.

LUKE 2:13-20

¹³ Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people he favors!

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

¹⁶ They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

■ CONTEXT

Notice that the news of Jesus' birth came to shepherds. You may have heard a sermon pointing out that shepherds were despised and downtrodden. This view is probably overstated. Luke wanted us to see that God revealed Himself to common people. The announcement of Jesus' birth didn't come to a king or the elite but to lowly, ordinary, hardworking shepherds. Luke's birth narrative shows us that Jesus came to be the Redeemer of all people.

EXAMINE

Gain a deeper appreciation for what the biblical text says.

Circle, underline, or highlight all of the places the shepherds and Mary responded to the news of Jesus.

LUKE 2:13-20

¹³ Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people he favors!

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

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Why does Jesus always merit a response of some kind?

What does this passage teach us about Jesus? What does it teach us about the necessity of faith?

APPLY

Recognize that the Bible calls us to obedience and to respond to God with our lives.

How are you responding to Jesus right now? After reading Luke 2, how do you plan to act?

Why does the gospel message compel us both to treasure its truths and to proclaim them to the world? How are you doing both?

PRAY

Respond to God with praise, thanksgiving, confession, and obedience.

Record a prayer to God in light of today's reading.

PERSONAL STUDY 3

READ

Slowly and intentionally read the Scriptures.

READ LUKE 3:1-18.

Most passages of Scripture have one key takeaway. Here the idea is repentance. Although this might not be a very popular word or thought in today's culture, it's thoroughly biblical. Repentance is necessary because our sin has separated us from God. We balk at the call to repent because it confronts our sinfulness and self-sufficiency. Repentance takes place only after we realize that we've been tainted by the stain of sin and that we need redemption.

LUKE 3:1-6

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.³ He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of **repentance** for the forgiveness of sins,⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

**Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight!**

- ⁵ **Every valley will be filled,
and every mountain and hill will be made low;
the crooked will become straight,
the rough ways smooth,**
- ⁶ **and everyone will see the salvation of God.**

■ MAIN THEME

REPENTANCE [V. 3]

Repentance means we turn away from our sin and turn 180 degrees to God. All people have a sin problem that can be resolved only when they repent of their sin and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Mark 1:14-15).

LUKE 3:7-18

⁷ He then said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. And don’t start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰ “What then should we do?” the crowds were asking him.

¹¹ He replied to them, “The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same.”

¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

¹³ He told them, “Don’t collect any more than what you have been authorized.”

¹⁴ Some soldiers also questioned him, “What should we do?”

He said to them, “Don’t take money from anyone by force or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵ Now the people were waiting expectantly, and all of them were questioning in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing shovel is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.” ¹⁸ Then, along with many other exhortations, he proclaimed good news to the people.

■ A GOOD QUESTION [V. 10]

When reading the Gospels, it’s always helpful to examine the responses of an audience. The question the crowds asked John, “What then should we do?” (v. 10), is a good one. They wanted to know what repentance should look like. John responded by calling the crowds to meet material needs. He answered the general population: be compassionate—give away your excess food and clothing; the tax collectors: work justly; and the soldiers: be content.

■ CHARACTER STUDY

JOHN THE BAPTIST [V. 16]

John the Baptist is a central figure in the Gospels. His birth narrative precedes that of Jesus (see Luke 1). The son of Elizabeth (Mary’s cousin) and Zechariah, John was the forerunner of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus said John was greater than all of the Old Testament prophets (Luke 7:28).

John’s ministry was prophesied in Malachi 3:1: “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in—see, he is coming,” says the LORD of Armies.” In this verse we see that John’s preaching would be a message of repentance that would make the way straight for people before the coming of the Messiah.

EXAMINE

Gain a deeper appreciation for what the biblical text says.

Read the following passage from Isaiah and respond to the questions that follow.

ISAIAH 40:3-5

- ³ A voice of one crying out:
 Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness;
 make a straight highway for our God in the desert.
⁴ Every valley will be lifted up,
 and every mountain and hill will be leveled;
 the uneven ground will become smooth
 and the rough places, a plain.
⁵ And the glory of the LORD will appear,
 and all humanity together will see it,
 for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Why did John quote these words? What was he trying to get his audience to understand?

Where do we see God's grace in this passage?

APPLY

Recognize that the Bible calls us to obedience and to respond to God with our lives.

Billions of people around the world don't have anyone sharing a message of salvation with them. What are we to do about this tragedy? How can we pray, give, and go to see God's glory and name known among the nations?

What could happen if we repented of our materialism and leveraged our possessions so that a world in need could see the salvation of our God?

Have you ever come to the point of repenting of your sin and confessing your need for the transforming power of the gospel?

PRAY

Respond to God with praise, thanksgiving, confession, and obedience.

Record a prayer to God in light of today's reading.