

LIVING THE QUESTIONS IN Luke

LIVING THE QUESTIONS IN Luke

A NavStudy Featuring *The*
MESSAGE[®]



NAV PRESS[®]

BRINGING TRUTH TO LIFE



OUR GUARANTEE TO YOU

We believe so strongly in the message of our books that we are making this quality guarantee to you. If for any reason you are disappointed with the content of this book, return the title page to us with your name and address and we will refund to you the list price of the book. To help us serve you better, please briefly describe why you were disappointed. Mail your refund request to: NavPress, P.O. Box 35002, Colorado Springs, CO 80935.

The Navigators is an international Christian organization. Our mission is to reach, disciple, and equip people to know Christ and to make Him known through successive generations. We envision multitudes of diverse people in the United States and every other nation who have a passionate love for Christ, live a lifestyle of sharing Christ's love, and multiply spiritual laborers among those without Christ.

NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators. NavPress publications help believers learn biblical truth and apply what they learn to their lives and ministries. Our mission is to stimulate spiritual formation among our readers.

© 2005 by The Navigators

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission from NavPress, P.O. Box 35001, Colorado Springs, CO 80935.
www.navpress.com

NAVPRESS, BRINGING TRUTH TO LIFE, and the NAVPRESS logo are registered trademarks of NavPress. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

ISBN 1-57683-861-7

Cover design by Disciple Design

Cover photo by Gary Walpole

Creative Team: Steve Parolini, Arvid Wallen, Kathy Mosier, Pat Reinheimer

Written and compiled by John Blase

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental.

All Scripture quotations in this publication are taken from *THE MESSAGE* (MSG). Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 09 08 07 06 05

FOR A FREE CATALOG OF
NAVPRESS BOOKS & BIBLE STUDIES,
CALL 1-800-366-7788 (USA)
OR 1-800-839-4769 (CANADA)

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE LIVING THE QUESTIONS SERIES	7
HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE	9
SMALL-GROUP STUDY TIPS	11
LESSON 1 <i>"If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?" (Luke 6:32)</i>	13
LESSON 2 <i>"Is this what you were expecting?" (Luke 7:23)</i>	25
LESSON 3 <i>"Which of the two would be more grateful?" (Luke 7:42)</i>	35
LESSON 4 <i>"Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?" (Luke 10:36)</i>	45
LESSON 5 <i>"And don't you think the Father who conceived you in love will give the Holy Spirit when you ask him?" (Luke 11:13)</i>	57
LESSON 6 <i>"True, they can kill you, but then what can they do?" (Luke 12:4)</i>	69
LESSON 7 <i>"Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice?" (Luke 12:51)</i>	81
LESSON 8 <i>"Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it?" (Luke 15:4)</i>	93

LESSON 9	105
<i>"But how much of that kind of persistent faith will the Son of Man find on the earth when he returns?" (Luke 18:8)</i>	
LESSON 10	119
<i>"What do you want?" (Luke 22:42)</i>	
NOTES	133

ABOUT THE LIVING THE QUESTIONS SERIES

I want to beg you, as much as I can . . . to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. . . . Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

RAINER MARIA RILKE, *LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET*

Christians usually think about Jesus as the One with all the answers; the God-man with the evidence the verdict demands; a divine answer-man, sent down to earth to give us just what we need. And yes, he did give us just what we needed. Yet a careful reading of the Gospels shows that Jesus asked just as many questions as he gave outright answers. You would not have found a “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it” bumper sticker on Jesus’ backpack. It was more like, “This is God’s Word. Stop and think about it, and let’s talk about it.”

However, the perception of Jesus as the divine answer-man appeals to a great many people. Life has questions, so you go to the Scriptures, look on the right page, find the answers, and everything’s good. But while that works great for algebra class, it just doesn’t seem to work well for this thing called *life*. Could the “divine answer-man” approach be too simplistic? Too one-dimensional for such a deep character as Jesus Christ? For one, it seems to leave you and me, the children of

God, out of the picture. We're not collaborators with God; we're just laborers.

Jesus went about doing good. Apparently part of this "good" was asking great questions—questions that would cause people to stop and pause and ponder the things they were living for and what might be worth dying for; questions not bound by a calendar but applicable to the ages; questions as poignant today as they were then.

The book you hold in your hand takes the approach of looking at the questions found in the Gospels—the questions Jesus asked. The questions are specific to the text of Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. I'm talking about questions such as, "All this time and money wasted on fashion—do you think it makes that much difference?" or "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick?" Our temptation might be to respond quickly because we think we know the answers. But what if these questions must be lived? Lived out in dimensions such as friendship, family, and church? Lived out in locales such as homes, classrooms, and forests primeval? Lived by the flesh and blood whose main focus is the future, and lived by those who think mainly of the past? And what if living out these questions might lead us one day, gradually, without noticing it, into The Answer—the One who described himself as the way, truth, and life?

Live the questions now.

HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. This NavStudy is meant to be completed on your own *and* in a small group. You'll want to line up your study group ahead of time. A group of four to six is optimal—any bigger and one or more members will likely be shut out of discussions. Your small group can also be two. Each person will need his or her own copy of this book.

2. Lessons open with a Scripture passage intended to help you to prepare your heart and mind for the content that follows. Don't skip over this preparation time. Use it to reflect, slow down from a busy life, and transition into your study time.

3. *Read* the Scripture passages and other readings in each lesson. Let it all soak in. Re-read if necessary. There's no blue ribbon for finishing quickly. Make notes in the white space on the page. If you like journaling, think of this as a space to journal. If you don't like journaling, just think of it as space to "think out loud on paper."

4. *Think* about what you read. Respond to the questions we've provided. Always ask, "What does this mean?" and "Why does this matter?" about the readings. Compare different Bible translations for Scripture readings. Respond to the questions we've provided, and then discuss the questions when you're in your small group. Allow the experience of others to broaden your wisdom. You'll be stretched—called upon to evaluate what you've discovered and asked to make practical sense of it. In community, that stretching can often be painful and sometimes even embarrassing. But your willingness to be transparent—your openness to the possibility of personal growth—will reap great rewards.

5. *Pray* as you go through the entire session: before you read a word, in the middle of your thinking process, when you get stuck on a concept or passage, and as you approach the time when you'll explore

these passages and thoughts together in a small group. Pause when you need to ask God for inspiration or when you need to cry out in frustration. Compose a prayer prompted by what you've uncovered in the readings and your responses to the "Think" questions.

6. *Live.* (That's "live" as in "rhymes with give" as in "Give me something I can really use in my life.") This is a place to choose one thing you can do to live out the question posed in the lesson. Don't try to craft a plan that is lofty or unreachable. Choose something small, something doable. Then, in your small group, talk about this "one thing." Commit to following through on your idea, wrestle with what that means in practical terms, and call upon your group members to hold you accountable.

7. *Follow up.* Don't let the life application drift away without action. Be accountable to small-group members and refer to previous "Live" as in "rhymes with give" sections often. Take time at the beginning of each new study to review. See how you're doing.

SMALL-GROUP STUDY TIPS

After going through each week's study on your own, it's time to sit down with others and go deeper. Here are a few thoughts on how to make the most of your small-group discussion time.

Set ground rules. You don't need many. Here are two:

First, you'll want group members to make a commitment to the entire ten-week study. Significant personal growth happens when group members spend enough time together to really get to know each other. Hit-and-miss attendance can hinder this growth.

Second, agree together that everyone's story is important. Time is a valuable commodity, so if you have an hour to spend together, do your best to give each person ample time to express concerns, pass along insights, and generally feel like a participating member of the group. Small-group discussions are not monologues. However, a one-person-dominated discussion isn't always a bad thing. Not only is your role in a small group to explore and expand your own understanding, it's also to support one another. If someone truly needs more of the floor, give it to him or her. There will be times when the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many. Use good judgment and allow extra space when needed. *Your* time might be next week.

Meet regularly. Choose a time and place, and stick to it. Consistency removes stress that could otherwise frustrate discussion and subsequent personal growth.

Follow the book outline. Each week, open your small-group time with prayer, and read aloud the reflective Scripture passage that opens

the lesson. Then go through the study together, reading each section aloud and discussing it with your group members. Tell others what you wrote. Write down new insights gleaned from other group members. Wrestle the questions together. When you get to the “Pray” section, ask for volunteers willing to read aloud their written prayers. Finally, spend a few minutes talking together about each person’s “one thing” and how to achieve that goal.

Talk openly. If you enter this study with shields up, you’re probably not alone. And you’re not a “bad person” for your hesitation to unpack your life in front of friends or strangers. Maybe you’re skeptical about the value of revealing to others the deepest parts of who you are. Maybe you’re simply too afraid of what might fall out of the suitcase. You don’t have to go to a place where you’re uncomfortable. If you want to sit and listen, offer a few thoughts, or even express a surface level of your own pain, go ahead. But don’t neglect what brings you to this place—that longing for meaning. You can’t ignore it away. Dip your feet in the water of brutally honest discussion, and you may choose to dive in. There is healing here.

Stay on task. Refrain from sharing material that falls into the “too much information” category. Don’t spill unnecessary stuff. If structure isn’t your group’s strength, try a few minutes of general comments about the study, and then take each question one at a time and give everyone in the group a chance to respond.

LESSON 1

“If you only love the lovable, do you expect
a pat on the back?” (Luke 6:32)

Before You Begin

Take some time to reflect and prepare your heart and mind for this study. Read the following Scripture passage. Soak up God’s Word. There’s no hurry. Then, when you’re ready, turn the page and begin.

MALACHI 1:7-10

“When you say, ‘The altar of GOD is not important anymore; worship of GOD is no longer a priority,’ that’s defiling. And when you offer worthless animals for sacrifices in worship, animals that you’re trying to get rid of—blind and sick and crippled animals—isn’t that defiling? Try a trick like that with your banker or your senator—how far do you think it will get you?” GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies asks you.

“Get on your knees and pray that I will be gracious to you. You priests have gotten everyone in trouble. With this kind of conduct, do you think I’ll pay attention to you?” GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies asks you.

“Why doesn’t one of you just shut the Temple doors and lock them? Then none of you can get in and play at religion with this silly, empty-headed worship. I am not pleased. The GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies is not pleased. And I don’t want any more of this so-called worship!”

READ

Luke 6:24-38

But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made.
What you have is all you'll ever get.

And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself.
Your *self* will not satisfy you for long.

And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and
games.
There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.

“There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

“To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

“Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for *them*! **If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?** Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that's charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.

“I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we’re at our worst, Our Father is kind; you be kind.

“Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don’t condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you’ll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you’ll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

THINK

“If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?”

- What is your immediate response to this question?
- Why do you think you responded in this way?
- What do you think of Jesus’ “simple rule of thumb for behavior”? Does it in any way describe your behavior? If so, how?
- Think about this reworking of Jesus’ words: “Give a pat on the back to the unlovable, pin a medal on those who cannot help you in any way, and give to charity and never write it off your income tax.” Do you find it foolish? Why or why not?
- “Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults. . . . Be easy on people.” Do you think Jesus is being just a little soft here? Why or why not? How does this compare with the way you relate to others?

READ

From *In the Presence of Fear*, by Wendell Berry¹

XVIII. In a time such as this, when we have been seriously and most cruelly hurt by those who hate us, and when we must consider ourselves to be gravely threatened by those same people, it is hard to speak of the ways of peace and to remember that Christ enjoined us to love our enemies, but this is no less necessary for being difficult.

XIX. Even now we dare not forget that since that attack of Pearl Harbor—to which the present attack has been often and not usefully compared—we humans have suffered an almost uninterrupted sequence of wars, none of which has brought peace or made us more peaceable.

XXI. What leads to peace is not violence, but peaceableness, which is not passivity, but an alert, informed, practiced, and active state of being. We should recognize that while we have extravagantly subsidized the means of war, we have almost totally neglected the ways of peaceableness. We have, for example, several national military academies, but not one peace academy. We have ignored the teachings and examples of Christ, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and other peaceable leaders. And here we have an inescapable duty to notice also that war is profitable, whereas the means of peaceableness, being cheap or free, make no money.

XXVI. The complexity of our present trouble suggests as never before that we need to change our present concept of education. Education is not properly an industry, and its proper use is not to serve industries, neither by job-training nor by industrial-subsidized research. Its proper use is to enable citizens to live lives that are economically, politically, socially, and culturally responsible. This cannot be done by gathering or “accessing” what we now call “information”—which is to say facts without context and therefore without priority. A proper education enables young people to put their lives in order, which means

knowing what things are more important than other things; it means putting first things first.

XXVII. The first thing we must begin to teach our children (and learn ourselves) is that we cannot spend and consume endlessly. We have got to learn to save and conserve. We do need a “new economy,” but one that is founded on thrift and care, on saving and conserving, not on excess and waste. An economy based on waste is inherently and hopelessly violent, and war is its inevitable by-product. We need a peaceable economy.

THINK

“If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?”

- Berry’s words were written after September 11, 2001. What are your first reactions to them?
- How hard is it for you to imagine that the questions Jesus asked have anything to do with an economy? Think about these two statements, the first from Jesus: “Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.” And the second from Berry: “The first thing we must begin to teach our children (and learn ourselves) is that we cannot spend and consume endlessly. We have got to learn to save and conserve.”
- What other similarities do you see between Jesus’ and Berry’s words?
- Do you think we’re training our children to be even remotely like what Christ has called us to be? Why or why not?

READ

From *Resistance*, by Barry Lopez²

After university I and my friends had scattered abroad—to Brussels, Caracas, Sapporo, Melbourne, Jakarta, any promising corner. Two or three went deep upriver on the Orinoco or out onto the plateaus of Tibet and Ethiopia. We had come to regard the work of writers and artists in our country as too compliant, as failing to expose or indict the escalating nerve of corporate institutions, the increasing connivance of government with business, or the cowardice of those reporting the news. In the 1970s and '80s, we thought of our artists and writers as people gardening their reputations, while the families of our neighborhoods disintegrated into depression and anger, the schools flew apart, and species winked out. It was the triumph of adolescence, in a nation that wanted no part of its elders' remonstrance or any conversion to their doubt.

The years passed. We had no plan. We had no hope. We had no religion. We had faith. It was our belief that within the histories of other, older cultures we would find cause not to be incapacitated by the ludicracy of our own. It was our intuition that even in those cultures into which our own had injected its peculiar folklore—that success is financial achievement, that the future is better, that life is an entertainment—we would encounter enduring stories to trade in. We thought we might be able to discern a path in stories and performances rooted in disparaged pasts that would spring our culture out of its adolescence. . . .

Our goal is simple: we want our country to flourish. Our dilemma is simple: we cannot tell our people a story that sticks. It is not that no one believes what we say, that no one knows, that none of our countrymen cares. It is not that their outspoken objections have been silenced by the rise at home of local cadres of enforcement and shadow operatives. It is not that they do not understand. It is that they cannot act. And the response to tyranny of every sort, if it is to work, must always be this: dismantle

it. Take it apart. Scatter its defenders and its proponents, like a flock of starlings fed to a hurricane.

Our strategy is this: we believe if we can say what many already know in such a way as to incite courage, if the image or the word or the act breaches the indifference by which people survive, day to day, enough will protest that by their physical voices alone they will stir the hurricane.

THINK

“If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?”

- Lopez’s work is fiction. How do you feel about what you read?
- The title of Lopez’s book is *Resistance*. And that is what Jesus is talking about in the passage from Luke 6—resisting the pull of society, culture, whatever you want to call it, and living for a higher cause. Write down what Lopez’s words provoke in you, keeping in mind what Jesus said about enemies, generosity, and so on.
- What is your response to the “tyranny” of our selfishness?
- Can we “incite courage” in ourselves and others, so as to “stir the hurricane” of righteousness? How would we go about that?

READ

From *The Clown in the Belfry*, by Frederick Buechner³

When Henry James, of all people, was saying goodbye once to his young nephew Billy, his brother William's son, he said something that the boy never forgot. And of all the labyrinthine and impenetrably subtle things that that most labyrinthine and impenetrable old romancer could have said, what he did say was this: "There are three things that are important in human life. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind."

Be kind because although kindness is not by a long shot that same thing as holiness, kindness is one of the doors that holiness enters the world through, enters us through—not just gently kind but sometimes fiercely kind.

Be kind enough to yourselves not just to play it safe with your lives for your own sakes but to spend at least part of your lives like drunken sailors—for God's sake, if you believe in God, for the world's sake, if you believe in the world—and thus to come alive truly.

Be kind enough to others to listen, beneath all the words they speak, for that usually unspoken hunger for holiness which I believe is part of even the unlikeliest of us because by listening to it and cherishing it maybe we can help bring it to birth both in them and in ourselves.

Be kind to this nation of ours by remembering that New Haven, New Hope, Shalom, are the names not just of our oldest towns but of our holiest dreams which most of the time are threatened by the madness of no enemy without as dangerously as they are threatened by our own madness within.

"You have tasted of the kindness of the Lord," Peter wrote in his letter, and ultimately that, of course, is the kindness, the holiness, the sainthood and sanity, we are all of us called to. So that by God's grace we may "grow up to salvation" at last.

THINK

“If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?”

- Do you agree with Henry James’ advice to his nephew? Why or why not?
- Don’t miss Buechner’s note that there are two ways of being kind: “gently kind” and “fiercely kind.” How would you define the difference between them?
- How do you feel about this sentence: “Be kind enough to yourselves not just to play it safe with your lives for your own sakes but to spend at least part of your lives like drunken sailors”?
- Consider this quote for a moment: “Our holiest dreams which most of the time are threatened by the madness of no enemy without as dangerously as they are threatened by our own madness within.” What is God saying to you through this thought?

PRAY

Look back at the “Think” sections. Ruminates on your responses. Let them distill into a prayer, and then write that prayer below.

Our Father, who is kind . . .

The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God.

ABRAHAM HESCHEL

LIVING THE QUESTIONS SERIES

Sample from *Living the Questions in Luke* / ISBN 1-57683-861-7

LIVE

“If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back?”

The challenge now is to take this question further along—to live out this question. Think of one thing, *just one*, that you can personally do to wrestle with the question, inhabit the character of it, and live it in everyday life. In the following space, jot down your thoughts on this “one thing.” Read the Scripture and quotes that follow for additional inspiration. During the coming week, pray about this “one thing,” talk with a close friend about it, and learn to live the question.

One thing...

We are at our best when we live for others.

Edward Abbey

“Be easy on people; you’ll find life a lot easier.”

Luke 6:37

Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

RAINER MARIA RILKE, *LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET*

LIVING THE QUESTIONS SERIES

Sample from *Living the Questions in Luke* / ISBN 1-57683-861-7