



OUR STORIES

STUDY GUIDE

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We have worked through understanding how God is working through our individual stories; the many stories we live as individuals, the stories God tells to, in, and through us. And yet, God who is community also models for us that our individual stories only mean so much if we have not placed them among other stories. And that's what the church is – the place, the experiences, the community in which we join our God-stories with others' God-stories and write a larger God-story that creates meaning not only for individuals but for the world. We find the place to join our stories together in the movements of Christian community – to learn together, to live together, to love together, and to lead together. When we participate fully in the practices of community, our story becomes even more vibrant, as we find it reflected in relationship and in collective purpose.

The best example we have of this movement of Learn, Live, Love, and Leading our lives together to tell the larger story of Christ's love is through the work of the first church in the book of Acts. The beginning of Acts picks up where the writer left off in the gospel of Luke – moving from the details of Jesus' life and ministry to the work of the early church empowered by the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Throughout this study, we will dive into the first 4 chapters of Acts which sets the tone for the rest of the work of the early church to move from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and the ends of their earth as public witnesses to the greatest story ever told – the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Register to participate weekly in the Sunday Night Bible Study sessions at 6:30 p.m. on Zoom at st.lukes.org/adults. Recorded sessions are available for viewing and listening Mondays at st.lukes.org/podcast.

WEEK 1 | October 24-31

LEAD your lives telling Jesus' Story

Key Texts: Acts 1:1-8

Our stories find connection as we learn God's story together, we live and practice God's story with one another, we love God in worship, rehearsing all we have learned and lived in order to ready ourselves to go to the world and be God's witness. Christ calls us to move from being students with him and put what we have learned on display by the way we LEAD our lives. We study, practice, and rehearse in order to go into the world and take God's stage, sharing God's story through our everyday lives. We LEAD our lives as if Christ were leading them – in what we do, our occupation, our family, our hobbies, everything. We are students who Learn, Live and Love in order to LEAD as public theologians – speaking God's story into existence through our words and deeds.

Christ's mandate to the disciples, that they would be witnesses to His Story in all of the world, required them to equip themselves with knowledge, trust, and wisdom, in order to go LEAD their lives in ways that demonstrated what they had experienced with Jesus. To order our lives around this rhythm to Learn, Live, and Love means we put God's story first in our lives to go out and LEAD together and tell God's story to the world. The Saints we celebrate on "All Saints Sunday" were people who showed us how to LEAD our lives with one story of love that could impact the entire world. They impacted us and called us to Lead lives worthy of the impact that takes the Message of Christ to the ends of the world as Public Theologians.

Think about these questions as you Learn, Live, Love, and Lead your life this week:

- In Romans 12, Paul writes “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” When we LEAD our lives as public theologians, we place our everyday life before God to be used to tell God’s story. Do you consider yourself a public theologian? How does that label make you feel?
- What do you think about the word LEAD when it comes to your everyday life? What does it mean to Lead like Jesus instead of Leading like the world?

Lecture Notes:

For Further Study

- What are some ways Luke ties together the story of Jesus from his Gospel and that of the Church—via the apostles—in Acts?

- What if anything does Jesus’ ascension have to do with the mission of the Church in Acts? Today?

- What is the significance of Jesus referring to the apostles as “my witnesses” (1:8)? How does this designation shape the nature of their mandate? Of the Church’s?

- The Holy Spirit is described in different if complementary ways in the New Testament. What seems to be its nature and function here as it relates to the ministry of the apostles—and by extension, the Church?

- What are we to make of the scope of mission outlined in Jesus' oracle to the apostles (1:8)? Does it represent something new or a continuation of the salvation-historical way of God? What does "to the ends of the earth" mean?

Podcast Notes:

For Discussion in Life Together Groups and Personal Reflection

- As public theologians, what does it mean to envision ourselves as "witnesses" (1:8) continuing the work of Jesus?

- In our contemporary context, what does it mean to imitate Jesus' "words and deeds" (see Acts 1:1)?

- Reflecting on the scope of Jesus' mandate, how might we conceptualize mission "to the ends of the earth" (1:8) today?

- Theologically, what is the importance of the "surprising" character of Jesus' oracle (1:6–8)? In what ways must we be open to having our own conceptions of God's purposes and our mission redefined and/or expanded?

How am I LEADing my life? What, if anything, do I need to change in order to live as a public theologian who tells God's story through my own life?

WEEK 2 | October 31-November 7

LEARN the story together

Key Texts: Acts 2:14-41

Our stories are connected as we LEARN how The Story, God's Story, the story of Jesus is a universal story. We connect our stories together and see the connection as we LEARN, really learn, digging deep into the story of God through Jesus. When we discipline ourselves to study and learn Scripture – not for memorization but for meaning in our everyday life, it changes how we relate to God, humanity, and our own lives.

John Wesley believed that Scripture was formative in our understanding of holiness, personal and social, and shaping us into the image of Christ. He believed reading Scripture should be a daily discipline because it was a primary “means of grace” – channels through which God presents grace to us in the stories of God and God's people. When we LEARN God's story of the progressive revelation of God and God's people throughout time, and our relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are formed, shaped and challenged by a story that is not of before, but our current story in which God invites us to participate and continue writing through our lives.

Think about these questions as you Learn, Live, Love, and Lead your life this week:

- Write a memory or consider how you feel when someone invites you to LEARN the stories of Scripture. Do you have memories of this from your younger days? Were they positive or negative?
- Were you taught there was only one way to LEARN Scripture or God's story? If so, what was “that” way? What would be different if you found other ways to both LEARN and READ Scripture?

- If you have never studied Scripture before – are there worries or fears that hold you back? We may say we don't have time, or a routine, but are there other reasons that may be at play?
- How does the discipline of intentionally LEARNING God's story – through our studies, podcast, personal reading – change how you would interact with God, faith, and Scripture on a daily basis?

Lecture Notes:

For Further Study

- How does Peter's understanding of his and his audience's participation in the larger story of God running through Jesus Christ inform his interpretation of Joel 3:1-5 (Acts 1:17-21)?

- Attuned to the larger story of God's salvation-historical work, Peter is able to seize upon the ancestor David's relevance for apprehending the significance of what was—and continues to be—accomplished through the risen Jesus. What roles does the figure of David perform in this respect?

- One of Peter's achievements here is to take specific traditions—i.e., about a Jewish ancestor, David—and make them widely applicable as part of the story for all peoples. How does he accomplish this? What role does the Holy Spirit play?

Podcast Notes:

For Discussion in Life Together Groups and Personal Reflection

- What kind of learning is necessary for us to grasp our mission at St. Luke's and beyond as part of God's larger story for humanity (enacted through the risen Lord Jesus and by the Holy Spirit)?

- How can and should we learn this story together?

- Who are our faith ancestors in this larger narrative? What understandings, traits, and actions do they exemplify as we seek to live into our calling as public theologians?

- What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us to understand and live out this story?

How am I LEARNing God's story each week? What, if anything, do I need to change in order live as a public theologian who applies God's story to everyday life?

Our stories are connected as we learn the story not only through intentional study, but through living in community with one another. We intentionally LIVE the Story together for care, accountability and to challenge our single story of God and of the world. Living God's story in community with those who are different than us helps us experience new understandings of who God is and how the Holy Spirit is at work through another person's experiences and relationship with Christ. Iron sharpens Iron – the Story comes to life through others, just as Jesus brought God's story to life among us, understanding our life and weaknesses as the Scripture tells us.

John Wesley reminds us that there is no religion that is lived out in isolation. The early Methodists devoted themselves to one another just as the early church did in Acts. Their responsibility was to not only share their individual learning of God's story, but to practice that story through holding one another accountable to the life change God's story brings about. They practiced God's story through sharing their hearts, their experiences and how the Holy Spirit was convicting and challenging them. When we not only LEARN the story for our personal edification, but PRACTICE the story by LIVING in community, God's story begins to take shape in our lives in new ways.

Think about these questions as you Learn, Live, Love, and Lead your life this week:

- What difference has it made when you have been in a small learning group of any kind? What about one that discusses the bible and theology, as well as life? What was that experience like for you?
- What are the benefits when we LIVE God's story through intentional community? What do we learn about God, ourselves and others? How does listening to others, shape your understanding of God?
- What holds us back from taking what we have LEARNED and sharing, wrestling, studying it in a small group, or life together group?

Lecture Notes:

For Further Study

- What terminology does Luke use to depict the early Jesus followers' common life?

- What activities characterized this life? What is their significance in the narrative—and for the Church today?

- How might the common life depicted in Acts 2:42-47 resonate with but also stand out in its cultural context?

- What is the role of the apostles in the common life of the Church?

- Speculate on the function of this portrait of life together at this particular junction in the unfolding story of God’s work both in and through the Church.

Podcast Notes:

For Discussion in Life Together Groups and Personal Reflection

- How are we to conceive of our common life—or “life together”—today?

- What activities are/should be integral of this life?

- What is the purpose of such life?

- What role should/should not leaders play in facilitating this common life?

- What is the place for individual stories, or “difference,” in this one story of life together?

- How is the Church’s—and St. Luke’s—life together easily understood and/or unique in today’s world?

Who is part of my community? Am I learning and practicing the story with my people? What, if anything, do I need to change in order to be a public theologian who lives God’s story through intentional community?

WEEK 4 | November 14-21

LOVE together

Key Texts: Acts 3-4

No matter what we learn and how we live together, we have to discipline ourselves as individuals and a community to LOVE together, loving God through proper worship that puts Jesus and God’s story at the center of our lives. Too often our stories become front and center in how we interact with the church, one another and the world, but worship is an opportunity to Love God and rehearse all we have learned and lived in order to move from this space and be on mission to tell the story. Loving together means our worship is centered around God as the audience and we retell God’s story in Christ as the main plot of our lives.

Think about these questions as you Learn, Live, Love, and Lead your life this week:

- What is worship to you? How would you answer that question differently thinking of worship as a noun vs a verb?
- How has worship been a part of forming your faith? What experiences do you remember being particularly impactful?

- What do you consider it means for God to be the focus and audience of our worship experience? How does that change your posture and approach to the worship hour?
- How does worship allow us to “rehearse” the story of God together before we go lead our lives like Jesus?

Lecture Notes:

For Further Study

- What in Luke’s narrative (Acts 3:1-10) suggests that the lame man’s malady is social as well as physical?

- What communal dimension is there to the healing of the lame man outside the temple?

- How does the loving deed of healing the lame man link Peter (and John) to Jesus?

- What connection(s) does Peter himself draw between the healing of the lame man and Jesus (see 3:11-16)?

- Explain ways in which Luke’s account of the lame man’s healing in 3:1-10 and the Jesus followers’ prayer in 4:23-31 prioritize God’s initiative, particularly his work through Jesus Christ.

Podcast Notes:

For Discussion in Life Together Groups and Personal Reflection

- Where should we as the Church be looking to help enact God's love through acts of individual and communal healing?

- What obstacles do we encounter to the kind of God-inspired love portrayed in the healing of the lame man?

- How can this kind of love contribute to societal renewal?

- What is the nature of the relationship between these external acts of love and our internal formation as a community of Jesus followers?

- How can/should we situate our love within the larger story of God's prior and all-encompassing love for us and humanity?

How does Loving God help me see the needs of others? Is God the focus and audience of my worship? What, if anything, do I need to change in order to rehearse God's story in community before I go out and lead my life like Jesus?