

The Empty Room Class

A new class in an empty room
that we hope won't be empty for long!
Sundays 9:50 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall
Coffee and Munchkins provided
Downtown First UMC • Lexington, KY



Are you new to Lexington?
To Christian faith?
To Downtown First UMC?
Do you want a safe place to explore
questions or doubts about Christianity?
Do you want to grow in your faith and friendships?
Then **The Empty Room Class** is for YOU!

Close Encounters of the Christ Kind in the Gospel of Luke - Part One

The Empty Room Class

Share this booklet, or a link to it at
www.doncummings.com with a friend and invite them
to join us in The Empty Room!

Introductions:

Class Leaders – Don & Bonnie Cummings

Don and Bonnie met at Asbury College in the spring of 1966 and married in September of their senior year at Asbury. After graduation in 1969 Don enrolled in Asbury Theological Seminary and Bonnie joined the faculty of Lafayette High School in Lexington to teach English. After graduating with a MDiv degree in 1972 Don began his thirty-seven-year ministry in the East Ohio Conference of the UMC where he served four congregations. Bonnie stepped away from her teaching career to rear their three children. When the youngest began elementary school Bonnie re-entered the work force in a parttime position with the Cleveland Health Education Museum. Within a few years she moved to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History full-time where she filled several positions climaxing with Chief Operating Officer and Interim Executive Director. Post retirement, they moved to Colorado where Don served an appointment in the mountain town of Buena Vista for five years. They moved to Lexington in February 2020 to be near their oldest child and her family. They have been attending Downtown since Easter, 2021 and love being part of this dynamic congregation.

Class Members

Please give the class a brief glimpse of who you are and something to help us remember you by.

Approaching the Gospel of Luke

Notes from Fred B. Craddock

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “Synoptic Gospels” because they can be “seen together” (syn-optic) and easily compared in three parallel columns. They contain many of the same stories and sayings, often related in the same relative sequence. Yet each of the three Gospels are shaped by its author’s own unique point of view. Some of the recognizable themes in Luke’s Gospel include:

- Jerusalem as the vital center of the story
- the continuity of Jesus with Judaism
- the Septuagint is used directly and allusively
- angels and wondrous revelations are common
- the evident power of the Holy Spirit
- the theme of universality
- the social messages of John and Jesus begin in Mary’s song
- the reversal of fortunes
- the dominance of the promise/fulfillment motif
- “today” is the time of God’s activity
- God is the principal character and power in and through all the events of the life of Jesus. Luke more than any other writer reminds us that God is the subject of the entire story, whatever the time, the place, or the cast of characters onstage

The church that lives in and with the Gospels testifies to a sense of being directly addressed by Jesus. We will seek to join the early Christians who first received this and other New Testament writings by the ear at public readings in worship: so read it aloud to your own ear. Be as open to making discoveries as you can. Do not be embarrassed if you find yourself saying, “I never noticed that before,” even in regard to passages that you may have read or heard all your life.

Understanding is a matter not only of intelligence but of character and readiness, and therefore the Scripture releases itself to us over a lifetime, as we are able. Scripture is sufficient for the generation of faith. The church interprets Scripture by both *listening to and seriously interrogating the texts*. This dual task of listening and interrogating will inform our approach to the Gospel of Luke.

The Panoramic View
An Outline of the Gospel of Luke
by Fred B. Craddock

Preface

Luke 1:1 - 4

Part One: Infancy and Childhood Narratives

Luke 1:5 – 2:52

Part Two: Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus

Luke 3:1 - 4:13

Part Three: The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee

Luke 4:14 – 9:50

Part Four: The Journey to Jerusalem

Luke 9:51 – 19:28

Part Five: The Ministry in Jerusalem

Luke 19:29 – 21:38

Part Six: The Passion Narrative

Luke 22:1 – 23:56

Part Seven: The Resurrection Narrative

Luke 24:1 – 53

The Closer View

1) Introduction and Birth Narratives (Luke 1:1 – 2:52)

- a) The author's approach and audience (1:1-4)
- b) Promised births
 - i) The angel's visit to Zechariah (1:5-25)
 - ii) The angel's visit to Mary (1:26-38)
 - iii) Mary's visit to Elizabeth (1:39-45)

- (1) Mary's Song of Praise and Prophecy (1:46-56)
- c) The birth of John the Baptist (1:57-66)
 - i) Zechariah's song (1:67-80)
- d) The birth of Jesus
 - i) The journey to Bethlehem (2:1-7)
 - ii) The angels' visit to the shepherds (2:8-15)
 - iii) The shepherds' visit to the manger (2:16-20)
 - iv) The infant Jesus presented in the temple (2:21-40)
 - v) The boy Jesus at the temple (2:41-52)

A Close Encounter of the Christ Kind
The Boy Jesus at the Temple
Luke 2:41-52 (NLT)

Reminder: The church interprets Scripture by *listening to the texts*. A free audio version of the Bible is available at <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/?recording=niv-mclean>. You may need to sign up for a free account.

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. ⁴² When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. ⁴³ After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss him at first, ⁴⁴ because they assumed he was among the other travelers. But when he didn't show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.

⁴⁵ When they couldn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. ⁴⁶ Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. ⁴⁷ All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸ His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," his mother said to him, "why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere."

⁴⁹ "But why did you need to search?" he asked. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?"^(a) ⁵⁰ But they didn't understand what he meant.

⁵¹ Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.

⁵² Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.

Reminder: The church interprets Scripture by *seriously interrogating the texts*.

Questions to Ask of the Text

1. Who did Jesus encounter in this story?
2. Where did Joseph and Mary find Jesus when they returned to search for him in Jerusalem? What was he doing?
3. What did the people witnessing this encounter between Jesus and the teachers in the temple think about the boy Jesus?
4. Jesus' reply to his parents in the temple are his earliest recorded words. What did he say and why is it so significant?

5. This is the only story in the New Testament about the boy Jesus. How did he grow during this most formative time in his life?
6. What can we learn about Jesus from this encounter?
7. R. Kent Hughes says that Mary and Joseph's multiple pilgrimages to Passover testify to their deep piety and devotion. Their godly parenting exposed the boy Jesus to Jewish faith, the temple and religious rites. In this environment, Jesus discovered his identity and purpose in life (Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Luke Vol 1*, p.99 ff). Fred Craddock says that in this story of Jesus at age twelve Luke's purpose is to "establish that Jesus was a true Israelite, from birth brought up in the moral and ritual life of Judaism. Home, temple and synagogue formed him. . . . At every significant period of his life he was in continuity with Judaism. Those periods for a firstborn male child were circumcision at eight days; dedication or presentation to God, in this case at six weeks when his mother was purified; bar mitzvah at age twelve; and public life at age thirty. These are the moments Luke marks in Jesus' life" (Craddock, *Interpretation Commentary: Luke* p. 41). What does this close encounter of the Christ kind teach about how faith is generated? What importance does it give to providing children exposure to Christian faith through the traditions and rituals of the church?
8. Can you remember an experience in your young life in the church or elsewhere that was formative in your spiritual awareness and growth? Did it help you discover your identity and purpose in any way?

Insights from Commentaries

“Luke’s model for this [boyhood story of Jesus] is 1 Samuel 2. The boy Samuel was given to God by his mother Hannah, and in time he was taken to live in the temple. It was in the temple that Samuel came to an awareness of his special mission. And of the boy Samuel it was said that he “continued to grow both in stature and favor with the Lord and with men” (1 Samuel 2:26) (Craddock, p. 42).

In “the earliest recorded words of Jesus . . . he asserted that God was his Father and that he stood in unique relationship to God. . . There is no parallel in the Old Testament for the phrase “my Father” in speaking of God. [In the Old Testament] God is only referred to as Father fourteen times . . . [and] always in reference to the nation [Israel], not to individuals. . . But when Jesus came on the scene, he addressed God as his Father and never used any other term. In all his prayers he addressed God as Father. The Gospels record his using Father more than sixty times in reference to God. This was a watershed experience for the twelve-year old. The awareness of his divine paternity was explicit in the very first of his recorded words in all of Scripture. . . What is the point? *Jesus is God’s Son! God is his Father.* One year before officially entering manhood, Jesus knew who he was” (Hughes, p. 103, 104).

Sources:

Craddock, Fred B., *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Luke*, John Knox Press: Louisville, 1990

Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Luke Volume One*, Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 1998

www.doncummings.com for copies of the weekly study guide for this class.

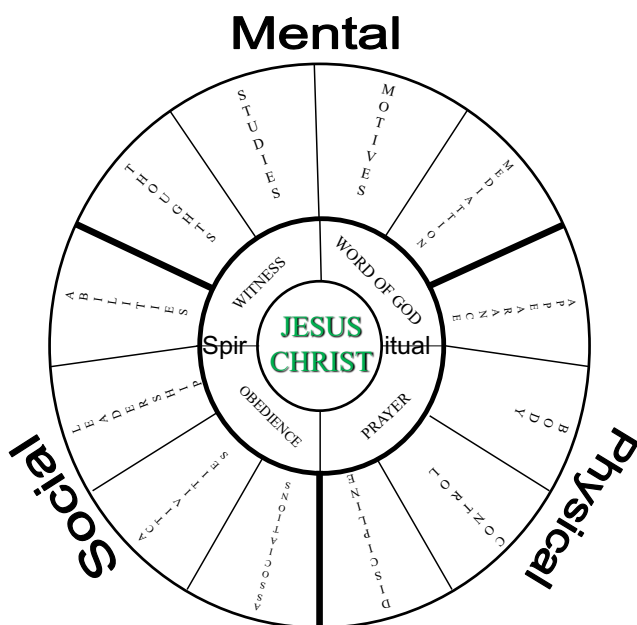
Also find William Barclay’s complete set of *The Daily Study Bible* commentaries for free online reading at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dsb.html>

Luke 2:52 Gives A Model of

The Balanced Life

“Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.”

Jesus grew into a balanced life and calls his followers to do the same.



The sixteen segments of the Balanced Life represented in the wheel above are areas in which we grow and develop personally. Jesus Christ is the hub of this wheel, the center of your life. As you grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and people, each part of your life will become more Christlike and as people look through any area of your life, they will see Christ at the center.

Our close encounters with Christ in Scripture will generate faith in us and faith will produce the kind of balanced life Jesus lived.

The Story Behind the Balanced Life Wheel

Bill Eakin was national Director of Youth For Christ Clubs when he came to lead a Youth For Christ camp in Houston in the summer of 1964. He taught the Balanced Life to the group of high school kids who came to the camp.

Bill explained that some time before he met the kids at the camp, he was in Mexico City with several Youth For Christ staff members. These were men who carried a heavy burden for reaching teenagers for Christ. As they met to study the Bible and to pray for a vision for their work, they came upon Luke 2:52 and realized it is the only story in the Gospels about Jesus when he was a teenager. As they discussed this verse they realized it clearly identified four areas of life in which Jesus grew: in wisdom (the Mental), and in stature (the Physical), and in favor with God (the Spiritual) and people (the Social).

Then, as they began to develop ideas for how to connect this insight into the teenage Jesus with the youth of America, they designed The Balanced Life Wheel. Bill spent the week of camp teaching the importance of giving all these areas of life to Christ and growing into maturity in them as Jesus did.

This concept of The Balanced Life was seen as a path to follow by teens as they transitioned from youth into adulthood, and it became a life-long way to understand and live the Christian life.

The concept of The Balanced Life has relevance to Christians of all ages and if you have young people in your family, consider spending some time explaining to them the components of The Balanced Life and how they can live into mental, physical, spiritual and social maturity by growing in the sixteen areas in The Balanced Life Wheel.

Why Study the Bible?

Harrel F. Beck of Boston University School of Theology used to tell his seminary students that wherever they went they carried with them 4,000 years of religious wisdom and tradition. Whether it was conversing at a lunch counter or stopping to help at a traffic accident, they brought into every life situation 4,000 years of the accumulated wisdom of the people of God. Much of this life-shaping wisdom is faithfully recorded in Scripture. This is why we study the Bible.

Fred B. Craddock often talked about the Scripture being sufficient for the generation of faith. R. Kent Hughes emphasized the influence of godly parents in passing on to the boy Jesus the practices and rituals of his Jewish faith. All this comes to us through the Bible. It has a great deal to teach us, and life is impoverished without this wisdom.

There are many ways to approach Scripture: as devotional literature, as history, as a source of religious or moral authority, as a book of answers for living, as the Word of God, etc. But the message of the Bible becomes more accessible if we think of it as a collection of conversations among people who are much as we are. We hear them as they talk with each other and with the God we find in these conversations.

At one level we are eavesdroppers overhearing what is being said. At another level we are participants as we enter the conversation with our own questions, objections, and insights. In this way we not only hear the witness of the ages, we become part of that witness. We engage it and it engages us.

The sharper our listening skills become, the more we learn from those who learned before us. Their experience and insights, as well as their mistakes and failures, can save us from a lot of misguided steps. In these conversations we find both blessings and curses; inspiration and desperation, and directional signs for which paths to follow and which to avoid.

We study the Bible so we can join this ongoing conversation with the people of God. They have much to teach us.

Some Ways to Study the Bible

1. A disciplined, regular reading of the Bible. The Common Lectionary or other reading plan tied to a schedule provides a way to stay connected to the Scriptures. See a variety of plans at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/>
2. Participation in a Bible study/discussion group that meets weekly or at least bi-weekly.
3. A formal class on the Bible at church, school, or online.
4. Conduct a word study. Select a key word in the Bible such as “love” or “believe” or “praise” or “redemption” and research its definition and use in both the Old and New Testaments.
5. Select a specific theme to study such as “the atonement” or “the concept of covenant” or “the reversal of fortunes” or “questions Jesus asked” and discover what the Bible teaches about it.
6. Conduct a study of a biblical character. Work up a character profile of everything Scripture says about a specific person. Who is it? Why are they mentioned in the biblical story? With whom did they have relationships? Note everything you learn about them.

Some Study Tools to Use

A Bible dictionary

A concordance of the Bible

Bible commentaries

A Bible Atlas

Introductions to the Old Testament and the New Testament

How to Contact Our Class Leader

Questions and suggestions are welcome

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