



LUKE

24 CHAPTERS

Originated from KJV Bible

LUKE 1

Many people have already tried to write down the amazing story of everything that happened among us, just like the early eyewitnesses and teachers first told it. Because I have carefully checked out all these events from the very beginning, most noble Theophilus, I decided it would be wonderful to write them all down for you in order. That way, you can be completely sure about the wonderful things you have been taught.

During the time when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias who belonged to the priestly group of Abijah. His wife, Elisabeth, also came from a family of priests descending from Aaron. Both of them lived good lives that pleased God, carefully following all of the Lord's commands without any fault. But they had no children because Elisabeth could not have babies, and they were both getting quite old.

One day, it was the turn of Zacharias's group to serve as priests before God. Following the usual custom of the priesthood, it was decided by drawing lots that Zacharias would go into the Lord's temple to burn incense. Outside, a huge crowd of people was praying while the incense was burning.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared, standing right beside the altar of incense. When Zacharias saw him, he was startled and panic swept over him.

But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zacharias! God has heard your prayer. Your wife Elisabeth will give birth to a son, and you are to

name him John. You are going to be so happy and filled with joy, and many people will celebrate his birth because he will be truly great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or any strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring many people of Israel back to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord with the powerful spirit of Elijah, turning the hearts of parents back to their children, helping stubborn people understand true wisdom, and getting a people fully ready for the Lord."

Zacharias asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well past her childbearing years."

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand right in the presence of God, and He sent me to speak to you and bring you this wonderful news. But because you didn't believe my words—which will definitely come true when the time is right—you will be silent and unable to speak until the day these things happen."

Meanwhile, the crowd outside was waiting for Zacharias, wondering why he was taking so long inside the temple. When he finally came out, he couldn't speak a single word to them. They quickly realized he must have seen a vision inside, because he had to use hand gestures to talk to them, remaining completely silent.

When his days of service at the temple were finally finished, he went back home. Soon after that, his wife Elisabeth became pregnant. She stayed quietly at home for five months, saying, "The Lord has done this for me. He has looked kindly upon me and taken away the shame I felt in front of people."

In the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee called Nazareth. He went to a virgin who was engaged to marry a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are wonderfully blessed! The Lord is with you."

Mary was deeply troubled by his words, wondering what kind of greeting this could possibly be.

The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. Listen! You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you must name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end!"

Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not yet married!"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. Because of this, the holy child born to you will be called the Son of God. Even your relative Elisabeth has miraculously conceived a son in her old age! People used to say she couldn't have children, but she is already in her sixth month. For with God, nothing is ever impossible."

Mary answered, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said happen to me." Then the angel left her.

Right around that time, Mary got up and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went straight into the home of Zacharias and greeted Elisabeth.

The moment Elizabeth heard Mary's cheerful greeting, her baby did a happy little flip inside her tummy, and Elizabeth was instantly filled with God's special, glowing spirit.

Raising her voice with pure joy, she exclaimed, "You are the most blessed of all women, and your baby is wonderfully blessed too! Why am I so lucky that the mother of my Lord should come to visit me? The second your greeting reached my ears, my baby leaped inside me for pure joy. You are so blessed for believing, because everything the Lord promised you is coming true!"

Then Mary sang out with a joyful heart, "My soul praises the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit dances with joy because of God, my Savior. He looked kindly on me, his humble servant, and from now on, people in every generation will call me blessed. The Mighty One has done wonderful things for me, and His name is holy! His mercy goes on forever for those who respect and love Him. With His mighty arm, He scatters the proud and shows their big egos to be foolish. He knocks proud rulers right off their thrones and lifts up the humble and ordinary. He fills hungry people with wonderful things, but sends rich people away with empty hands. He has reached out to help His servant Israel, keeping the promise of mercy He made so long ago to Abraham and his children forever."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months before heading back home.

Soon, it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, and she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. When her neighbors and relatives heard how wonderfully kind God had been to her, they rushed over to celebrate and share her happiness.

On the eighth day, everyone gathered to name the baby, expecting to name him Zacharias after his father. But Elizabeth spoke up quickly, "No! His name is going to be John."

The crowd looked at her in surprise. "There is nobody in your family with that name!" they protested. So they used hand gestures to ask his father, Zacharias, what he wanted to name the boy.

Zacharias asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's absolute amazement, he wrote: "His name is John."

Instantly, Zacharias could speak again! His mouth opened, his tongue was untied, and he began talking a mile a minute, praising God.

A wave of holy awe swept through the whole neighborhood, and stories about these amazing events spread like wildfire all through the hill country of Judea. Everyone who heard the news tucked it away in their hearts, wondering, "What kind of child is this going to be?" It was clear that God's special hand was upon him.

Then Zacharias, filled completely with the Holy Ghost, began to prophesy:

"Praise be to the Lord God of Israel! He has stepped into our world to rescue and redeem His people. He has raised up a mighty Savior for us from the family of His servant David, just as He promised long ago through His holy prophets. He has rescued us from our enemies and from everyone who wishes us harm. He has shown the mercy He promised to our ancestors, remembering His holy agreement and the sacred oath He swore to Abraham. He promised to rescue

us from our fears so we can serve Him bravely, living holy and righteous lives right in His presence every single day of our lives.

"And you, my little baby, will be called the prophet of the Most High. You will walk right ahead of the Lord to clear the path for Him, teaching His people how they can be saved through the forgiveness of their sins. Because of our God's tender mercy, the bright morning sun from heaven is dawning upon us, shining its warm light on everyone sitting in darkness and the shadows of death, guiding our wandering feet onto the peaceful path."

And so the little boy grew, becoming strong in spirit and character, and he lived out in the desert places until the day he finally stepped out to introduce himself to Israel.

LUKE 2

Long ago, Emperor Augustus issued a command that everyone in the entire Roman world had to register for a census. (This was the very first registration, happening while Quirinius was the governor of Syria.)

So, everyone packed up and traveled back to their own hometowns to sign up.

Joseph also left his home in the town of Nazareth, up in Galilee, and traveled down to Judea. He went to Bethlehem, the historic hometown of King David, because Joseph was a direct descendant of David. He needed to register there along with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was heavily pregnant.

While they were staying in Bethlehem, the time finally came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him snugly in cloth strips, and laid him gently in a feeding trough because there simply was no room for them to stay in the local inn.

Out in the nearby countryside, some shepherds were spending the night outdoors, taking turns keeping watch over their sheep in the dark.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared right beside them, and a dazzling, brilliant light from heaven shone all around them. The shepherds were absolutely terrified!

But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! I have wonderful news to share with you—news that will bring great joy to all people everywhere. Today, in King David's town, a Savior has been born for you. He is Christ the Lord! And here is how you will know it's true: you will find a newborn baby wrapped in cloths and lying in an animal's feeding trough."

Right after the angel spoke, the sky filled with a massive choir of heavenly angels, all praising God together and singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace and goodwill to all people!"

As soon as the angels drifted back up into the clouds and returned to heaven, the shepherds turned to each other and said, "Let's hurry straight to Bethlehem! Let's go see this incredible thing that the Lord has just told us about."

They dashed into town and quickly found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, who was resting right where the angel said, in a manger.

After seeing the child with their own eyes, the shepherds told everyone they met about what the angels had said about this special baby. Everyone who heard the shepherds' story was amazed. But Mary quietly treasured all these words, turning them over and over in her heart.

The shepherds eventually went back to their fields and flocks, shouting praises and thanking God for everything they had seen and heard, which matched the angel's message completely.

When the baby was eight days old, the time came for his circumcision, and he was officially named Jesus—the exact name the angel had given him even before he was conceived in Mary's womb.

Later, when the time came for Mary's ritual purification under the law of Moses, they traveled to Jerusalem to present the baby to the Lord. As it is written in God's law, "Every firstborn male shall be set apart as holy to the Lord." They also brought the required offering: a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

At that time, a righteous and deeply devoted man named Jerusalem lived in the city. He was eagerly waiting for God to comfort and rescue Israel, and the Holy Spirit was with him. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not pass away until he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah.

Prompted by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple courts just as Mary and Joseph carried the baby Jesus inside to perform the usual religious customs. Simeon scooped the baby up into his arms, praised God, and prayed:

"Master, now you can let your servant die in peace, just as you promised. My eyes have finally seen your rescue, which you prepared out in the open for all nations to see—a light to guide the nations, and the ultimate glory of your people Israel."

Joseph and Mary were stunned by what Simeon said about the child. Simeon blessed them, and then said directly to Mary, "Mark my words: this child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall and many others to rise. He will be a sign from God that people will argue against—and a sharp sword will pierce your own soul, too. Because of him, the hidden thoughts of many hearts will be brought to light."

There was also a very old prophetess named Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, from the tribe of Asher. She had been married for just seven years before her husband passed away, and she had lived as a widow until she was eighty-four years old. She never left the temple grounds, worshiping God day and night through fasting and intense prayer.

Just as Simeon was speaking, Anna walked up to them. She began thanking God and talking about the child to everyone in Jerusalem who was waiting expectantly for God to rescue His people.

Once Joseph and Mary had finished carrying out every single requirement of the Lord's law, they traveled back home to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

And the child grew up, becoming physically strong, deeply wise, and spiritually mature, with the rich favor of God resting continually upon him.

Every single year, Jesus's parents traveled to Jerusalem for the big Passover celebration. When Jesus turned twelve, the family made the familiar journey up to the city together just like they always did.

When the festival finally came to an end, everyone started heading back home. But young Jesus secretly stayed behind in Jerusalem, and neither Joseph nor Mary noticed. Assuming he was simply walking somewhere else in the large travel group, his parents journeyed for a whole day before they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.

When they couldn't find him anywhere, they worriedly turned around and hurried all the way back to Jerusalem to search for him. After three long days of looking, they finally spotted him inside the temple. He was sitting right in the middle of the teachers, listening intently and asking them smart questions. Everyone who heard him speak was completely blown away by how much he understood and how well he answered.

When his parents finally found him, they were totally stunned. "Son, why did you do this to us?" Mary asked. "Your father and I have been frantically searching everywhere, so worried and sad."

Jesus looked at them and replied, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be here, taking care of my Father's house?"

Even though they didn't fully understand what he meant at the time, Jesus obediently went back home to Nazareth with them, where he continued to grow up. Mary carefully tucked all these special moments away in her heart. As Jesus grew older, he kept maturing in wisdom, height, and in the love of both God and everyone around him.

LUKE 3

During the fifteenth year of Emperor Tiberius's rule, while Pontius Pilate governed Judea and Herod ruled Galilee—with his brother Philip in charge of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias governing Abilene—and while Annas and Caiaphas served as high priests, a special message from God reached Zechariah's son, John, out in the lonely desert.

John immediately traveled all through the Jordan River valley, telling people about a baptism that showed a changed heart and forgiveness of sins. This was just like the prophet Isaiah had written long ago: *“Listen! Someone is shouting out in the desert, ‘Get the road ready for the Lord! Clear away the bumps and obstacles so His path is straight and smooth. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill will be lowered, winding roads will be straightened, and bumpy paths paved flat. And then, everyone everywhere will witness God’s rescue.’”*

Crowds of people rushed out to the river to be baptized by him, but John didn't sugarcoat his words. “You brood of snakes!” he warned them. “Who tipped you off to escape the coming disaster? Prove your hearts have really changed by doing good things. Don't just sit back and say to yourselves, ‘We are safe because Abraham is our ancestor.’ Let me tell you, God has the power to turn these very stones into children of Abraham! The axe is already pressed against the roots of the trees. Every tree that fails to grow sweet, good fruit will be chopped down and tossed straight into the fire.”

Confused and eager to do the right thing, the crowd asked him, “Well, what should we do?”

John answered simply, “If you own two coats, give one to someone who has none. If you have extra food, share it with the hungry.”

Even the tax collectors—who were famous for taking more money than they should—came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”

“Don’t collect a penny more than what you’ve been officially told to charge,” John told them.

Then some soldiers stepped up and asked, “And what about us?”

John replied, “Never bully anyone, don’t accuse people falsely, and be completely happy with your regular pay.”

Everyone in the region was on edge, wondering and whispering among themselves if John might secretly be the long-awaited Messiah.

Reading their minds, John announced to them all, “I wash you with simple water, but someone much greater and more powerful is coming right behind me—someone so incredible that I am not even worthy to untie the laces of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire! He comes ready to clean up His threshing floor, gathering the good wheat into His barn while burning up the useless chaff in a fire that never goes out.”

With many other inspiring messages like these, John kept preaching to the crowds. However, when John bravely scolded the ruler Herod for marrying his brother Philip’s wife, Herodias, and for all the other

terrible things he had done, Herod committed one final crime: he threw John straight into a dark prison.

Not long after, while all the everyday people were being baptized, Jesus Himself stepped into the water to pray. Suddenly, the sky split wide open, and the Holy Spirit swooped down upon Him looking just like a dove. A booming voice echoed straight from heaven, declaring, “You are My deeply loved Son, and I am wildly pleased with You!”

At this point in His life, Jesus was about thirty years old. Though people assumed He was merely the son of Joseph, His family tree stretched all the way back through history:

Jesus was the son of Joseph, son of Heli, son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Melchi, son of Janna, son of Joseph, son of Mattathias, son of Amos, son of Nahum, son of Esli, son of Naggai, son of Maath, son of Mattathias, son of Semei, son of Joseph, son of Judah, son of Joannan, son of Rhesa, son of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, son of Neri, son of Melchi, son of Addi, son of Cosam, son of Elmadam, son of Er, son of Joshua, son of Eliezer, son of Jorim, son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Simeon, son of Judah, son of Joseph, son of Jonam, son of Eliakim, son of Melea, son of Menna, son of Mattatha, son of Nathan, son of King David, son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz, son of Salmon, son of Nahshon, son of Amminadab, son of Admin, son of Arni, son of Hezron, son of Perez, son of Judah, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, son of Terah, son of Nahor, son of Serug, son of Reu, son of Peleg, son of Eber, son of Shelah, son of Cainan, son of Arphaxad, son of Shem, son of Noah, son of Lamech, son of Methuselah, son of Enoch, son of Jared, son of Mahalalel,

son of Cainan, son of Enosh, son of Seth, son of Adam, and ultimately, the son of God.

LUKE 4

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan River and was led by the Spirit straight into the wild desert.

For forty long days, the devil tried to trick Him. Jesus didn't eat a single thing the whole time, so by the end of it, He was extremely hungry!

The devil sneaked up to Him and said, "If you're really God's Son, go ahead and turn this boring stone into a yummy loaf of bread."

Jesus shook His head and replied, "God's Book says that people need more than just food to live—we need every single word that comes from God!"

Next, the devil whisked Him up to a super high mountain and flashed a magical movie screen in front of His eyes, showing Him every glowing kingdom in the entire world in just a split second.

The devil grinned and boasted, "I'll hand over all this power and glory to you. It belongs to me, and I can give it to whoever I want. Just bow down and worship me once, and the whole world is yours!"

"Back off, Satan!" Jesus commanded firmly. "God's Book says: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him and Him alone!'"

Finally, the devil took Him all the way to Jerusalem, perched Him right on the highest rooftop of the grand temple, and challenged Him: "If you're God's Son, jump!

"After all," the devil teased, quoting Scripture, "God will order His angels to catch you so you don't even stub your toe on a rock."

Jesus looked at him and said, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had thrown every trick in his book at Jesus, he gave up and slinked away to wait for another day.

With the full power of the Spirit, Jesus traveled back to Galilee, and soon, everyone across the countryside was buzzing with talk about Him. He taught in their meeting places, and everyone praised His name.

Eventually, He visited Nazareth, the town where He grew up. True to His habit, He went to the local synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to do the reading.

They handed Him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled it and found the exact spot where it said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has chosen me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to heal broken hearts, set prisoners free, give sight to the blind, rescue the oppressed,

And announce that this is the very year the Lord shows His favor."

Jesus rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every single pair of eyes in the room locked onto Him.

"Today," He announced to the crowd, "you just watched this scripture come true right here in front of you."

Everyone was amazed, whispering to one another about how wonderfully He spoke. But then someone muttered, "Wait a minute... isn't this just Joseph's kid?"

Jesus read their minds and said, "I know what you're thinking—you want me to pull off the same miracles here in my hometown that people saw in Capernaum. But let me tell you the truth: hometown heroes never get any respect.

"Think about it: during the great famine when it didn't rain for three and a half years, there were plenty of widows in Israel. Yet Elijah wasn't sent to help any of them. Instead, he was sent to a foreign widow in Sarepta. And even though there were lots of sick people with skin diseases in Israel during Elisha's time, the only one cured was Naaman the Syrian!"

The moment the crowd heard that, their faces turned red with fury. They leaped out of their seats, grabbed Jesus, and shoved Him all the way to the edge of the steep hill the town was built on, fully intending to push Him over the cliff!

But Jesus simply walked right through the middle of the angry mob and went His own way.

He headed down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught the people every Sabbath. They were completely blown away by His teaching because His words carried real power and authority.

One Sabbath, a man possessed by a spooky, unclean spirit burst into the meeting place, screaming at the top of his lungs:

"Hey! Leave us alone, Jesus of Nazareth! Did you come here to destroy us? I know who you are—you're the Holy One of God!"

Jesus sharply cut him off. "Quiet! Come out of him!"

With one final, violent shake, the spirit threw the man to the floor, popped right out of him, and left him completely unharmed.

Everyone's jaw dropped. They stared at each other, saying, "What kind of superpower is this? He gives orders to nasty spirits with total authority, and they actually obey Him!"

Word about Jesus spread like wildfire into every corner of the region.

Leaving the meeting place, Jesus went to Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was flat on her back with a blazing fever, and the family begged Jesus to help her.

Jesus walked over to her bed, spoke sternly to the fever, and *poof*—it vanished instantly! She jumped right out of bed and started fixing them lunch.

As the sun began to set, people from all over dragged their sick friends and family members—suffering from every kind of illness imaginable—to Jesus. He gently laid His hands on each one of them and healed them all on the spot.

Even invisible dark spirits were forced out of people, screaming, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" But Jesus shushed them immediately, refusing to let them speak because they already knew who He really was.

Early the next morning, Jesus sneaked off to a quiet, lonely place. But the crowds tracked Him down, swarmed Him, and begged Him not to leave them.

Jesus smiled and told them, "I have to share the Good News about God's kingdom with other towns too, because that's what God sent me to do."

And so, He continued traveling and preaching in the meeting places all across Galilee.

LUKE 5

One busy day, as a huge crowd pressed around Jesus to hear God's words by the shore of Lake Gennesaret, he spotted two empty fishing boats. The fishermen were standing nearby, washing their nets. Jesus climbed into one boat, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to push it out just a little bit into the water. Sitting comfortably in the boat, Jesus taught the eager crowds along the beach.

When he finished speaking, Jesus turned to Simon and said, "Row out into deep water and drop your nets for a catch!"

Simon shook his head and replied, "Master, we worked hard all night long and caught absolutely nothing. But since you asked, I'll drop the nets."

No sooner had they done this than their nets trapped so many wriggling fish that the mesh began to rip! They waved frantically to

their partners in the other boat to come help. Both boats were soon loaded down with so many fish they almost started to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this incredible sight, he dropped to his knees right in front of Jesus and whispered, "Please go away from me, Lord, because I am just a messy, sinful person." Simon, along with his partners James and John (the sons of Zebedee), and everyone else with them, were completely stunned by the huge haul of fish.

Jesus smiled at Simon and said, "Don't be afraid. From now on, you'll be catching people instead of fish!" As soon as they steered the boats back to shore, they left everything behind and followed him.

Later on, in another town, a man covered from head to toe with a skin disease saw Jesus coming. He threw himself face-down in the dirt and begged, "Lord, if you really want to, I know you can make me clean and healthy."

Jesus reached out his hand, gently touched the man, and said, "I do want to. Be clean!" In a flash, the sickness vanished.

Jesus told him, "Don't tell anyone about this yet. Just go show yourself to the priest and bring the proper offering that Moses commanded, so everyone knows you are healed."

Instead, the man couldn't keep quiet—word about Jesus spread like wildfire! Massive crowds gathered everywhere just to hear him speak and to be healed of their illnesses. But Jesus frequently snuck away into quiet, lonely places to pray.

One day, while Jesus was teaching, a group of curious religious leaders—Pharisees and teachers of the law who had traveled from

every village in Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem—were sitting nearby, and the healing power of Jesus was strongly present.

Suddenly, some men arrived carrying a paralyzed friend on a mat. They tried to push through the packed doorway, but the crowd was simply too thick. Undeterred, they climbed up an outside stairway to the flat roof, peeled back some of the tiles, and lowered their paralyzed friend right down on his mat into the middle of the room, landing right in front of Jesus.

Seeing their incredible teamwork and faith, Jesus looked at the man and said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The scribes and Pharisees immediately started grumbling to themselves, *"Who does this man think he is, talking like that? That's total blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins."*

Reading their thoughts instantly, Jesus challenged them, "Why are you arguing in your hearts? Which do you think is easier to say—'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'? But so you know that the Son of Man has the authority right here on earth to forgive sins..." Jesus turned back to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, stand up, pick up your mat, and walk on home!"

Right in front of everyone, the man jumped straight to his feet, grabbed the mat he had been lying on, and marched home praising God at the top of his lungs! Everyone in the room was completely mind-blown. Filled with holy awe, they praised God and whispered, "We have seen the most unbelievable things today!"

Shortly after that, Jesus went for a walk and spotted a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax booth. Jesus simply looked at him and said, "Follow me."

Without a second thought, Levi stood up, left his job behind, and followed him.

Later, Levi threw a huge celebratory feast at his house for Jesus. A big crowd of tax collectors and other notorious sinners showed up to eat with them. When the local Pharisees and their scribes saw this, they turned their noses up and complained to Jesus' disciples, "Why on earth do you eat and drink with low-down tax collectors and sinners?"

Hearing this, Jesus answered them with a smile, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—only the sick do. I didn't come to invite proud, 'good' people; I came to invite messy sinners to turn their lives around."

Then some people asked him, "Hey, John's disciples fast and pray all the time, and so do the Pharisees' disciples. Why do your disciples constantly eat and drink and party?"

Jesus replied, "Do you expect wedding guests to fast and starve while the groom is right there hanging out with them? Of course not! But the days are coming when the groom will be taken away from them, and *then* they will fast."

Then Jesus told them a clever little story: "No one tears a patch off a brand-new jacket to sew onto an old, threadbare coat. If you do, you ruin the new jacket, and the patch won't match the old one anyway. And nobody pours fresh, bubbling new wine into old, brittle leather

wine skins. If you do, the new wine will expand and burst the old skins, ruining both the wine and the container! New wine always goes into fresh, stretchy new skins so that both are safely preserved. Besides, nobody who has been drinking fine old wine suddenly shouts, 'Pour me some of that brand-new stuff!' because they always say, 'Ah, the old stuff is much better!'"

LUKE 6

One sunny Sabbath day, Jesus and his hungry friends were walking through a tall field of grain. As they strolled, the disciples plucked the heads of wheat, rubbed them between their hands to shuck the seeds, and happily snacked on them.

Nearby, some strict religious leaders called Pharisees crossed their arms and frowned. "Hey!" they scolded. "Why are you doing work that is forbidden on the Sabbath?"

Jesus smiled calmly and asked them, "Haven't you ever read the story about King David? When he and his hungry friends were starving, David walked right into God's house and ate the holy bread that only the priests were allowed to eat. He even shared it with his hungry men." Then Jesus looked at the Pharisees and said, "Remember this: the Son of Man is in charge of the Sabbath, not the other way around."

A few days later, on another Sabbath, Jesus was teaching inside a crowded synagogue. Sitting in the audience was a man whose right hand was completely withered and useless. The suspicious scribes

and Pharisees watched Jesus closely, hoping he would break the Sabbath rules by healing the man so they could get him into trouble.

Jesus read their minds instantly. He looked at the man with the withered hand and said, "Stand up and step right into the center of the room."

The man stood up bravely. Jesus turned to the hostile crowd and asked, "Let me ask you a question: Is it against the rules to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? To save a life, or to destroy it?"

Nobody answered. They just glared at him in silence.

Jesus looked around at every single one of them, his heart aching at their stubbornness. Then he turned back to the man and said, "Stretch out your hand."

The man held out his arm, and instantly, his hand was completely healed and looked just as healthy as the other!

Instead of being happy for the man, the leaders flew into a furious rage. They rushed outside and began plotting together, wondering what on earth they could do to stop Jesus.

Knowing how intense things were getting, Jesus hiked up a quiet mountain to talk to God. He spent the entire night out under the stars, praying to his Father.

When morning finally broke, he gathered his followers close and chose twelve special men to be his closest helpers, his apostles. These were the names he chose: Simon (whom he nicknamed Peter) and his brother Andrew; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Simon the

patriot; Judas the brother of James; and Judas Iscariot, who would later turn against him.

Jesus walked down the mountain with his new team and stepped out onto a wide, flat plain. A massive crowd was waiting for him—people who had traveled from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and even the faraway coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon. They all pushed forward just to hear him speak and to be healed of their sicknesses. People struggling with dark, invisible burdens were set free, and the crowds pressed in just to brush their fingertips against his clothes, because a powerful healing energy flowed right out of him and cured everyone.

Looking out at the sea of eager faces, Jesus began to teach his disciples:

"You poor people are truly blessed, because God's kingdom belongs to you. You who are hungry right now are blessed, because you are going to be stuffed with good things. You who are crying right now are blessed, because you are going to laugh again. And you are especially blessed when people hate you, kick you out of their groups, insult you, and treat your name like garbage just because you follow the Son of Man.

"When that happens, jump up and down and throw a party! Why? Because a huge reward is waiting for you in heaven. After all, people treated the ancient prophets the exact same way.

"But watch out, you rich people! You've already had your easy, comfortable life. Watch out, you who are stuffed and happy right now! You're going to end up starving. Watch out, you who are laughing right now! You're going to be crying and mourning soon.

And watch out when everyone in town thinks you're wonderful and only says nice things about you—because that's how their ancestors treated the fake prophets!"

Jesus didn't stop there. He taught things that completely flipped people's expectations upside down:

"Listen closely to me: Love your enemies. Do good things to the people who hate you. Bless the people who curse you, and pray for the bullies who treat you terribly. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn and let them slap the other one, too. If someone steals your jacket, don't even fight them—let them have your shirt as well. Give whatever you can to anyone who asks, and if someone takes your stuff, don't chase them down demanding it back. Treat other people exactly how you would want them to treat you.

"If you only love the people who love you back, what makes you so special? Even selfish people love their friends! If you only help people who help you, what's the big deal? Even crooks do that. If you only lend money when you expect to get paid back with interest, why should God give you a gold star? Crooks lend to crooks all the time to make a profit.

"No, you need to love your enemies! Do good things and lend without expecting anything in return. If you do that, your reward in heaven will be massive, and you will truly be acting like children of the Most High God. Remember, he is kind even to people who are ungrateful and mean. So be merciful, just like your heavenly Father is merciful.

"Stop judging other people, and you won't be judged. Stop condemning others, and you won't be condemned. Forgive, and

you'll be forgiven. Give generously, and people will give back to you—a huge, overflowing pile poured right into your lap! The same size basket you use to measure out kindness to others is the exact same basket God will use to measure kindness back to you."

Then Jesus shared a funny picture with a serious point:

"Can a blind person lead another blind person safely down the street? Of course not! They'll both tumble right into a muddy ditch. A student isn't greater than their teacher, but once you've learned everything, you'll be just like your teacher.

"And hey—why are you obsessing over the tiny speck of sawdust in your friend's eye when you've got a giant wooden log stuck in your own eye? How can you look at your friend and say, 'Here, let me pick that little speck out of your eye,' when you're stumbling around with a tree trunk in your face? You hypocrite! First, pull the giant log out of your own eye, and *then* you'll actually be able to see clearly enough to help your friend with their speck.

"A healthy tree doesn't grow rotten fruit, and a rotten tree doesn't grow delicious fruit. You can always tell what kind of tree you're looking at by the fruit it drops. You don't walk up to a thorn bush to harvest fresh figs, and you don't pick juicy grapes off a prickly bramble patch.

"It's the exact same way with people. A good person has a heart full of good treasures, so good words and actions just naturally pour out of them. But an evil person has a heart full of junk, so bad stuff pours out of their mouth. Your words always show what's really overflowing in your heart.

"So why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord' while ignoring the things I tell you to do?

"Let me tell you what a person who actually listens to my words and puts them into practice is really like. They are like a wise builder who dug deep, deep down into the earth and laid their house's foundation right on solid bedrock. When a massive flash flood roared down the valley, a raging river slammed violently against that house—but it couldn't budge it an inch! Why? Because it was built on solid rock.

"But the person who hears my words and *doesn't* do them? They are like a foolish builder who slapped up a house on top of loose dirt with no foundation at all. The moment the raging river slammed into that house, it collapsed instantly, crashing down into a giant, messy pile of ruins."

LUKE 7

After Jesus finished teaching the big crowd, he walked into the sunny town of Capernaum.

Right away, some people came to him with a worried story. A Roman army officer—called a centurion—had a helper who was very sick and almost dying. The officer cared about this helper a lot!

Since the officer couldn't come himself, he sent some Jewish leaders to ask Jesus, "Please, will you come and make him well?"

When the leaders found Jesus, they begged him, saying, "This officer really deserves your help! He loves our people so much that he even paid to build our town's church."

So Jesus went with them. But before they reached the house, the officer sent a second group of friends with a humble message: "Master, please don't trouble yourself. I am not good enough to have you walk under my roof, and I didn't even think I was worthy to come see you myself. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed! I know how authority works—I have soldiers under me, and when I tell one to go, he goes. When I tell another to come, he comes. I tell my servant to do something, and he does it."

Jesus was amazed when he heard this! He turned around to the crowd following him and said, "I tell you the truth, I haven't seen faith this strong anywhere in the whole country!"

And when the messengers hurried back to the house, they found the sick servant completely healthy and strong.

The very next day, Jesus traveled to a town called Nain, with a huge crowd of happy disciples and followers walking right beside him.

As they got close to the city gates, a sad sight stopped them. A young man had died—he was a widow's only child, and a large group from the town was walking with the crying mother.

When the Lord saw her, his heart filled with kindness. He gently told her, "Don't cry."

Then he walked up and touched the wooden stretcher carrying the young man. The pallbearers froze in their tracks. Jesus spoke out loud: "Young man, I say to you, get up!"

Instantly, the young man who had been dead sat right up and started talking! Jesus happily handed him back to his mother.

A wave of holy awe swept through the crowd. Everyone praised God, shouting, "A mighty prophet has appeared among us!" and "God has come to rescue His people!" Word about Jesus spread like wildfire across the entire countryside.

Back in prison, John the Baptist's helpers told him all about these amazing miracles. John called two of his closest students and sent them on a mission to find Jesus.

"Go ask him," John told them, "Are you the special hero we've been waiting for, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

When the men found Jesus, they repeated John's exact question. Right at that very moment, Jesus was busy curing people of terrible diseases, driving out dark spirits, and helping blind people see again!

Jesus smiled at the messengers and said, "Go back and tell John what your own eyes have seen and your ears have heard: the blind can see, the crippled are walking around, people with skin diseases are healed, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the wonderful good news is being preached to the poor. And blessed is anyone who doesn't lose faith in me!"

After John's messengers left, Jesus turned to the crowd and talked about John. "What did you go out into the wild desert to see?" he asked. "A weak piece of grass blowing in the wind? Or did you go to see a guy wearing fancy, soft clothes? People who wear expensive designer outfits hang out in royal palaces! No, you went to see a

prophet, right? Yes, and I'm telling you, he is much more than just a prophet. He is the one the old writings talked about: *'Look, I am sending my special messenger ahead of you to clear your path.'* Truly, of all the people ever born, there has never anyone greater than John the Baptist. Yet, even the smallest person in God's kingdom is greater than he is!"

Everyone who listened—even the tax collectors who had been baptized by John—agreed that God's way was right. But the religious leaders and Bible experts proudly ignored God's plan for them and refused John's baptism.

Jesus continued, "What is this generation like? They are just like kids sitting in the town square playing games, yelling across to their friends: *'We played happy music on our flutes, but you wouldn't dance! We sang sad funeral songs, but you wouldn't cry!'*

"Think about it: John the Baptist came living a super strict life, not eating fancy food or drinking wine, and you all said, 'He has a crazy demon!' Then the Son of Man comes along eating and drinking normally, and now you say, 'Look at him—a total foodie, a party animal, and a best friend to crooks and sinners!' But God's wisdom is always proven right by the people who truly love it."

One day, a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus over for dinner. Jesus agreed and went to his house to eat.

Now, there was a woman living in that town who had a reputation for making bad choices. When she found out Jesus was eating dinner at Simon's house, she grabbed a tiny, beautiful jar filled with sweet-smelling perfume.

She sneaked in behind Jesus as he reclined at the table, crying so hard her tears dripped onto his feet. She gently washed his dusty feet with her tears, dried them softly with her long hair, kissed them over and over, and rubbed the sweet perfume all over them.

Simon, the host, watched this and thought to himself, *If this guy were really a prophet, he would instantly know what kind of woman is touching him right now. She's a total sinner!*

Reading his thoughts, Jesus spoke up: "Simon, I have a quick story to tell you."

"Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied.

"There were once two men who owed money to the same bank," Jesus said. "One man owed a massive five hundred coins, and the other owed a much smaller fifty coins. Neither of them had any money to pay it back, so the kind owner simply canceled both debts and forgave them completely. Now, tell me, which of those two men do you think will love the owner more?"

Simon thought about it. "Well... I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"Spot on," Jesus said.

Then, turning toward the woman while still looking at Simon, Jesus asked, "Do you see this woman? When I walked into your house, you didn't even offer me water to wash the dust off my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair! You didn't even greet me with a welcoming kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since the moment she walked in. You didn't even put a drop of simple olive oil on my head, but she has poured expensive

perfume all over my feet. Because of this, I'm telling you: her many sins are forgiven, and she has shown great love. But someone who is forgiven only a little bit doesn't show much love."

Then Jesus looked right at the woman and told her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other dinner guests started whispering among themselves in shock, *"Who does this guy think he is, going around forgiving sins?!"*

But Jesus ignored them, smiled gently at the woman, and said, "Your trust in God has saved you. Go in peace!"

LUKE 8

Soon after, Jesus traveled from town to town, sharing the wonderful news about God's kingdom. His twelve closest friends went with him, along with several women he had helped and healed. Among them were Mary Magdalene, who had been set free from scary shadows; Joanna, whose husband worked for King Herod; Susanna; and many others who happily shared what they had to support Jesus and his team.

As huge crowds gathered around him from every direction, Jesus told them a story to help them understand:

"A farmer went out to plant seeds in his garden. As he scattered them, some seeds landed right on the busy pathway. People stepped on them, and hungry birds swooped down to gobble them right up!

Other seeds landed on rocky ground. They popped up quickly, but because they had no deep roots, the hot sun beat down and withered them away.

Some seeds fell among prickly thorn bushes, which shot up fast and choked the little plants so they couldn't grow.

Finally, some seeds landed in rich, dark soil. They sprouted, grew strong, and produced a massive harvest—a hundred times more than what was planted!”

When he finished, Jesus called out, “If you have ears to listen, pay attention!”

Later, his disciples asked him, “What does this story mean?”

Jesus smiled and told them, “You are privileged to understand the secrets of God’s kingdom, while others hear it through stories so they can think deeply about it. Here is the meaning: The seed is God’s message.

The seeds on the pathway are people who hear the message, but then the tricky thief comes along and steals it from their hearts before they can believe and be saved.

The seeds on the rocky ground are people who hear the message and get super excited at first. But they don't have deep roots, so when hard times or tricky tests show up, they quickly give up.

The seeds that fell among the thorns are people who hear the message, but then get completely distracted by everyday worries, the shiny trap of money, and the fun distractions of life, so their good traits never fully grow.

But the seeds in the good soil are the wonderful people who listen to the message with an honest, open heart, hold onto it tightly, and patiently grow into kind, helpful people.”

Jesus then asked them a fun question: “Does anyone light a bright lamp and then hide it under a heavy bowl or stuff it under a bed? Of course not! You put it up high on a stand so everyone walking into the room can see the warm light. Everything that is hidden will eventually come out into the open, and secrets will be known. So be very careful how you listen, because whoever uses what they know will get even more, but whoever doesn't care will lose even the little bit they thought they had.”

Right then, his mother and brothers arrived, but they couldn't get near him because the crowd was so packed. Someone called out to him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside and really want to see you.”

Jesus looked around at the friendly faces and said, “My mother and my brothers are the ones who listen to God’s message and actually live it out every day!”

Later that day, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s hop in a boat and sail across the deep lake.”

So they pushed off the shore and set sail. As they drifted along, Jesus fell fast asleep. Suddenly, a wild, howling storm came roaring down over the water! Huge waves crashed into the boat, and it started filling up with water. They were in serious danger!

Panicking, they rushed over and shook Jesus awake, crying, “Captain, Captain, we’re going to sink!”

Jesus sat up, stretched, and calmly scolded the howling wind and the wild, choppy waves. Instantly, the wind stopped, the water became glass-smooth, and everything was completely quiet.

He looked at his friends and asked, “Where is your trust?”

Trembling with amazement, they whispered to each other in absolute shock, “Who on earth is this? Even the winds and the roaring waves listen to his voice!”

Soon, their boat bumped ashore in the region of the Gadarenes, right across from Galilee. The moment Jesus stepped out onto the dry land, a wild man from the town came running up to him. He had been troubled by mean spirits for a long time, wore no clothes, and lived all alone among cold, spooky tombs.

When he spotted Jesus from a distance, he let out a loud shriek, fell flat on his face in the dirt, and shouted at the top of his lungs, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of God Most High? Please, I’m begging you, don’t punish me!” (Jesus had already commanded the hurtful spirit to leave the man. The poor guy had often lost control of himself, and even though people tried to tie him up with heavy chains and leg irons, he would snap them apart and run wild out into the lonely desert.)

Jesus looked at him kindly and asked, “What is your name?”

The man gasped, “My name is Legion, because there are a whole army of mean spirits inside me!” They begged Jesus not to banish them away into the dark abyss.

A huge herd of pigs happened to be munching on grass nearby up the hill. The spirits pleaded, “Please, let us go into those pigs instead!”

Jesus gave them permission.

Suddenly, the mean spirits zoomed out of the man and rushed straight into the pigs! The whole noisy herd went wild, stampeded down the steep cliff, splashed into the lake, and vanished under the water.

When the pig-herders saw what happened, they panicked and sprinted away, shouting the crazy news all through the town and countryside. Curious townspeople rushed out to see what had happened. When they found Jesus, the formerly troubled man was sitting calmly right at Jesus’ feet—fully dressed, acting completely normal, and smiling peacefully. The crowd was terrified!

The eyewitnesses eagerly explained how the man had been healed. But instead of being happy, the whole frightened crowd begged Jesus to please pack up and leave their neighborhood. So Jesus hopped back into the boat and prepared to head home.

The man who had been set free begged, “Please, can I come with you?”

Jesus smiled, patted his shoulder, and said, “No, go back to your own house and tell everyone the amazing things God has done for you.”

So the man walked all over town, excitedly telling everybody how wonderfully Jesus had changed his life!

When Jesus crossed back over the lake, a huge, happy crowd welcomed him warmly because they had been waiting eagerly for his return.

Suddenly, a synagogue leader named Jairus pushed through the crowd, threw himself down at Jesus' feet, and begged him to come to his house. His only child, a sweet twelve-year-old girl, was terribly sick and slipping away. Jesus agreed and started walking with him, but the massive crowd pressed in so tightly they almost crushed him.

In the crowd was a woman who had been miserably sick for twelve years. She had spent every single penny she owned on doctors, but nobody could make her feel better—in fact, she just got worse.

Creeping up quietly behind Jesus, she gently brushed her fingertips against the edge of his flowing cloak. Instantly, her sickness vanished, and she felt completely healthy!

Jesus stopped and asked, “Who just touched me?”

Everyone shook their heads. Peter laughed and said, “Master, the whole crowd is bumping and shoving against you from every side, and you're asking, ‘Who touched me?’”

Jesus smiled and said, “Someone touched me on purpose, because I felt healing power flow right out of me.”

Realizing she couldn't hide, the woman came forward shaking with fear. She dropped to her knees and explained to everyone exactly why she had touched him and how she was instantly cured.

Jesus looked down at her tenderly and said, “Dear daughter, don't be afraid. Your strong trust has healed you. Go in peace.”

While he was still speaking, a messenger arrived from Jairus's house with sad news: "Your daughter has passed away. There's no need to bother the Teacher anymore."

Overhearing this, Jesus looked right at the heartbroken father and said gently, "Don't be afraid. Just believe, and she will be fine."

When they reached the house, Jesus didn't let anyone go inside with him except Peter, James, John, and the little girl's mom and dad. Everyone inside was crying loudly and mourning.

Jesus said softly, "Stop crying. She isn't dead; she's just sleeping."

The mourners laughed right in his face because they knew for a fact that she had passed away.

So Jesus gently ushered them all out of the room. He walked over to the bed, took the little girl's warm hand in his, and called out clearly, "Little girl, wake up!"

Her breath rushed back, her eyes fluttered open, and she sat right up! Jesus smiled and told her parents to get her something yummy to eat.

Her mom and dad were completely stunned and speechless. But Jesus gave them a gentle reminder, telling them not to tell a single soul what had just happened.

LUKE 9

Jesus gathered his twelve special friends—his disciples—and gave them the superpower to heal the sick and chase away bad spirits. He sent them out on a big adventure to share God's love, telling them to travel light: no extra clothes, no money, and not even a walking stick!

"If people are kind and welcome you into their home, stay there until it's time to move on," Jesus told them. "But if a town won't listen to you, just walk away and shake the dust off your shoes as you leave."

So, the friends packed up and journeyed from town to town, spreading the good news and healing everyone they met.

Soon, the local ruler, King Herod, heard all about the amazing things Jesus was doing. People whispered about who Jesus might be—some said he was John the Baptist come back to life, while others thought he was an ancient prophet like Elijah.

"I already had John's head chopped off," Herod said nervously. "So who *is* this man?" He became very curious and really wanted to meet Jesus face-to-face.

When the disciples returned from their journey, they excitedly told Jesus everything they had done. Wanting a quiet moment to rest, Jesus took them away to a peaceful spot near a town called Bethsaida.

However, the crowds figured out where they were and followed them! Instead of sending them away, Jesus welcomed the people

with a warm smile, talked to them about God's kingdom, and healed everyone who was hurting.

As the sun began to set, the twelve disciples came to Jesus and said, "It's getting late, and we are out in the middle of nowhere. You should send the crowds away so they can find food and places to sleep in the nearby villages."

Jesus surprised them by saying, "Why don't *you* give them something to eat?"

The disciples looked at each other in shock. "Feed them all? We only have five small loaves of bread and two little fish! Unless we run to the store and buy food for this massive crowd, we have nothing."

There were about five thousand men, plus women and children!

"Have everyone sit down on the grass in groups of fifty," Jesus instructed.

The disciples did as they were told, arranging the huge crowd into neat little groups. Then Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up into the bright sky, and thanked God. He broke the food into pieces and handed them to the disciples to pass out to the hungry crowd.

Everyone ate until they were completely full! Afterward, the disciples gathered up the leftovers—and there was so much extra food that it filled twelve big baskets.

Later on, while Jesus was praying by himself nearby, his disciples joined him.

"Who do the crowds say that I am?" Jesus asked them.

"Some say you're John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others think you're an old prophet come back to life," they replied.

"And who do *you* think I am?" Jesus asked, looking right at them.

Peter stepped forward and answered proudly, "You are the Christ sent by God!"

Jesus nodded, but told them to keep it a secret for now. He explained that he had a difficult road ahead—that he would suffer greatly, be rejected by the leaders, and even be killed, but that he would rise again three days later.

Gathering everyone close, Jesus shared an important life lesson: "If you want to follow me, you have to stop living just for yourself, be brave through hard times, and keep your eyes on me. If you try to save your own life by playing it safe, you'll miss out on the real meaning of life. But if you give your life for my sake, you will truly find it."

A week later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a high mountain to pray. As Jesus prayed, his face suddenly glowed like the sun, and his clothes flashed blindingly white!

Even more amazing, two famous heroes from the past—Moses and Elijah—appeared in glorious light, chatting with Jesus about his upcoming journey in Jerusalem.

Peter and the other two disciples had been fast asleep, but when they rubbed their eyes and woke up, they were stunned to see Jesus shining bright with the two heavenly visitors.

As Moses and Elijah started to fade away, Peter blurted out, "Master, it's so wonderful that we're here! Let's build three tents—one for

you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!" Peter didn't really know what to say because he was so overwhelmed.

Suddenly, a bright, puffy cloud rolled over and covered them all, and the disciples felt a little scared. From inside the cloud, a booming, gentle voice declared, "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him!"

When the cloud lifted, Jesus was standing there all by himself. They kept this incredible secret to themselves, not telling a single soul what they had seen.

The very next day, as they walked down the mountain, a huge crowd met them. Right away, a desperate father rushed forward and fell to his knees.

"Master, please, I'm begging you to look at my son!" the man cried out. "He is my only child. A scary spirit keeps grabbing him, making him scream, shake, and foam at the mouth. It hurts him terribly and won't let go. I asked your disciples to drive it away, but they couldn't."

Jesus sighed and said, "Oh, what a stubborn and faithless generation. How long do I have to put up with this? Bring your boy here to me."

As the boy ran over, the evil spirit knocked him to the ground in a violent fit. But Jesus sharply scolded the bad spirit, instantly healed the boy, and handed him back to his overjoyed father. Everyone watched in absolute awe at the mighty power of God.

While people were still gasping in amazement at everything Jesus could do, he pulled his disciples aside. "Listen closely to what I'm

telling you: the Son of man is going to be handed over into the hands of men."

The disciples still didn't understand what he meant—it was like a hidden code to them—and they were too nervous to ask him to explain.

Along the way, the disciples started arguing quietly among themselves about a silly question: *Which one of us is the most important?*

Jesus, knowing every thought in their hearts, gently scooped up a little child and stood the little boy right beside him.

"Whoever welcomes a child like this in my name, welcomes me," Jesus told them. "And whoever welcomes me, welcomes God who sent me. The one among you who is the most humble—treating themselves like the youngest and least—is actually the greatest."

John spoke up, saying, "Master, we saw a guy using your name to chase away bad spirits, but we told him to stop because he isn't part of our official group!"

"Don't stop him," Jesus replied with a smile. "Anyone who isn't against us is on our side."

As the time drew closer for Jesus to finish his work on earth, he set his mind firmly on going to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead to prepare a place to stay in a Samaritan village.

However, the villagers refused to let them stay because they saw Jesus was heading toward Jerusalem, and the local people didn't get along with travelers going that way.

When James and John saw this, they were furious. "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn this whole town up, just like Elijah did?" they asked angrily.

Jesus turned around and gave them a stern look. "You have no idea what kind of spirit you're acting like! I didn't come to destroy people's lives; I came to save them." So, they simply packed up and walked to a different village instead.

As they walked down the road, a man ran up and said, "Lord, I'll follow you no matter where you go!"

Jesus looked at him gently and replied, "Foxes have dens to sleep in, and birds have nests, but the Son of man doesn't even have a place to lay his head."

Then Jesus pointed to another man and said, "Come, follow me."

"Lord," the man replied, "let me go home first to bury my father."

Jesus shook his head and said, "Let the spiritually dead worry about burying their own dead. You go and announce the kingdom of God."

Still another person stepped up and said, "I'll follow you, Lord, but let me first go say goodbye to everyone at my house."

Jesus smiled and gave him a final, wise piece of advice: "No one who puts their hand on the plow to farm, and then looks backward over their shoulder, is ready for the kingdom of God."

LUKE 10

After these events, Jesus chose seventy-two more helpers and sent them out in pairs ahead of him to every town and village he planned to visit.

He told them, "There is so much work to do, but only a few people to help. So, ask the Master of the harvest to send out more workers into His fields. Now go! But remember, I am sending you out like little lambs walking into a pack of wolves. Don't pack a wallet, a travel bag, or extra shoes, and don't get distracted by chatting with people along the road.

"Whenever you step into a home, your first words should be, 'Peace be to this house.' If a peace-loving person lives there, your blessing will stay with them; if not, it will come right back to you. Stay in that same house, eating and drinking whatever they share with you, because a worker deserves to be paid. Don't bounce around from house to house.

"When you enter a town and the people welcome you, eat whatever they put on the table. Heal their sick and tell them, 'God's kingdom is right here on your doorstep!'

"But if you go into a town and they refuse you, walk out into the main street and declare, 'Even the dirt of your town stuck to our shoes is wiped off against you! But know this for sure: God's kingdom has still come close to you.' Trust me, on judgment day, it will be much easier for the ancient city of Sodom than for that stubborn town!

"How terrible it will be for you, Chorazin and Bethsaida! If the mighty miracles done among you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, those people would have repented long ago, wearing rough burlap and sitting in ashes. Truly, judgment day will be kinder to Tyre and Sidon than to you. And you, Capernaum—who think you are headed straight for heaven—you will be thrown down into the depths!

"Whoever listens to you is listening to me. Whoever rejects you is rejecting me. And whoever rejects me is rejecting the One who sent me."

Later, the seventy-two returned with huge smiles, cheering, "Master, even the evil spirits obeyed us when we used your name!"

Jesus smiled back and said, "I watched Satan fall out of the sky like a flash of lightning. Listen, I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to conquer all the power of the enemy. Nothing will ever harm you. But don't be happy just because the spirits obey you; be thrilled because your names are written down in heaven!"

At that moment, Jesus was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit and prayed, "Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these deep truths from the so-called wise and clever, and revealing them to ordinary children. Yes, Father, because that is what made you happy."

Then Jesus turned to his disciples and whispered, "How blessed are your eyes for seeing what you see right now! Many prophets and kings longed to see and hear the things you are experiencing, but they never got the chance."

Suddenly, an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus, asking, "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?"

Jesus replied, "What is written in the God's law? How do you read it?"

The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind; and love your neighbor just as much as you love yourself."

"You nailed it," Jesus said. "Do that, and you will live."

Wanting to look clever and defend himself, the lawyer asked, "Well... just who *is* my neighbor?"

To answer him, Jesus told a story: "A man was traveling down the dangerous, winding road from Jerusalem to Jericho when a gang of robbers ambushed him. They stripped off his clothes, beat him up, and left him bleeding on the side of the road, half dead.

"By coincidence, a priest was walking down that same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed to the other side and hurried past. A little later, a Temple assistant walked by, came over to take a look, and also walked past on the other side.

"Finally, a despised Samaritan traveler came down the road and saw the man. Instead of walking away, his heart filled with deep pity. He knelt beside him, cleaned his wounds with soothing olive oil and wine, and wrapped them up. Then he gently lifted the man onto his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and stayed to take care of him.

"The next morning, the Samaritan handed the innkeeper two silver coins and said, 'Take care of him. If this isn't enough to cover his stay, I'll pay you the rest when I pass through here again.'

"Now," Jesus asked the lawyer, "which of these three men do you think proved to be a true neighbor to the man who was attacked by robbers?"

The lawyer answered, "The one who showed mercy to him."

Jesus smiled and said, "Go and do the exact same thing."

As Jesus and his friends continued their journey, they came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat comfortably at Jesus' feet, hanging on his every word.

Meanwhile, Martha was running around stressed out, trying to prep a massive meal for everyone. Annoyed, she marched up to Jesus and said, "Lord, don't you even care that my sister has left me to do all the cooking and serving by myself? Tell her to get up and help me!"

Jesus gently replied, "Martha, Martha, you are fussing and worrying about so many things. Only one thing is truly important. Mary has chosen the best thing, and nobody is going to take that away from her."

LUKE 11

One day, Jesus was finishing up a quiet time of prayer in a cozy spot. One of his followers walked up to him and said, "Master, could you teach us how to talk to God, just like John taught his friends?"

Jesus smiled and told them, "When you pray, speak from your heart like this: 'Dear Father in heaven, may everyone treat your name with great respect. May your wonderful kingdom come soon. May your loving will happen right here on earth, just as it does in heaven. Please give us the food we need for today. And please forgive us our wrong choices, because we gladly forgive everyone who hurts us. And please don't let us walk into tricky temptations, but keep us safe from the bully of badness.'"

Then Jesus told them a funny story to explain how much God loves to answer prayers: "Imagine it's the middle of the night, pitch black outside, and you are already tucked into your warm bed with your kids. Suddenly, a friend bangs on your door, shouting, 'Hey! A traveler just showed up at my house, and I have zero food to feed him! Can you lend me three loaves of bread?'

From inside your bedroom, you might call out, 'Oh, please don't bother me now! The door is locked, the kids are asleep, and I really don't want to get up.'

Even if you wouldn't get up just because you're friends, guess what? Because that guy keeps knocking and won't give up, you'll finally groan, roll out of bed, and give him all the bread he needs!"

Jesus leaned in and said, "Here is the big secret: Just ask, and God will give it to you. Keep searching, and you will find it. Knock on the door, and it will swing wide open for you. Because everyone who asks gets an answer; everyone who searches finds; and the door always opens for the one who knocks.

Think about it: if your child asks you for a piece of bread, would you hand him a hard rock? If he asks for a fish, would you hand him a creepy snake? If he asks for an egg, would you give him a stinging scorpion? Of course not! Even though humans make mistakes, you still know how to give awesome treats to your kids. So how much more will your loving heavenly Father give wonderful gifts to the people who ask Him?"

Not long after, Jesus healed a man who couldn't speak, driving away the trouble inside him. Suddenly, the man could talk, and the crowd gasped in amazement!

But a few grumpy people in the crowd whispered, "He's only doing magic tricks because he's teamed up with the king of darkness, Beelzebub!" Others tried to trap him by demanding, "Show us a cool magic trick from the sky to prove who you are!"

Jesus read their minds like an open book and said, "That makes no sense! If a kingdom is fighting itself, it will crash and fall apart. If Satan is fighting against his own team, how can his dark kingdom survive? You claim I use the devil's power, but if that were true, whose power do your own family members use when they help people? Your own logic proves you wrong! But if I am driving out darkness with the powerful finger of God, then God's amazing kingdom has just landed right in your neighborhood.

When a strong, heavily armed bully guards his castle, all his stuff is safe. But what happens when someone even *stronger* shows up and beats him? The stronger hero takes away all the bully's weapons and gives away everything he stole!

If you aren't on my team, you're working against me. If you aren't helping me gather people, you're scattering them."

Jesus added a warning: "When an unclean spirit leaves a person, it wanders through lonely deserts looking for a place to rest. When it finds none, it says, 'I'll go back to my old house.' When it gets there, it finds the house spotless, swept, and looking great! So the spirit goes and invites seven even nastier spirits to move in with it. And the poor person ends up way worse off than they were at the very beginning."

Right then, a woman in the crowd shouted out, "How wonderful it is to be the mother who gave birth to you and nursed you!"

Jesus gently replied, "Even more wonderful are the people who actually listen to God's words and live by them!"

As the crowd squeezed closer and closer, Jesus shook his head and said, "This generation is a tricky one. They keep demanding a flashy sign, but the only sign they are going to get is the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just like Jonah was a walking sign for the people of Nineveh, the Son of Man will be a sign for people today. The Queen of the South will stand up on judgment day and shake her finger at this generation, because she traveled from the very edge of the map just to listen to Solomon's wisdom—and someone *much* greater than Solomon is standing right here! The people of Nineveh will also stand up and point at this generation, because they changed their

hearts when Jonah preached—and someone *much* greater than Jonah is standing right here!"

Jesus continued, "Nobody lights a bright candle and then hides it under a bowl or tucks it in a dark closet. No, they put it on a lampstand so everyone walking in can see the warm, helpful light.

Your eye is the lamp for your whole body. If your eyes are focused on good things, your whole life is full of bright light. But if your eyes are greedy and selfish, your life is full of scary darkness. So make super sure that the light inside of you isn't actually hidden darkness! If your whole body is lit up with light and has no dark corners, you will shine just as bright as a lamp lighting up a room."

While Jesus was still talking, a religious leader named a Pharisee invited him over for lunch. Jesus went in and sat right down at the table. The Pharisee blinked in shock, muttering to himself because Jesus hadn't washed his hands with the fancy religious soap before eating.

The Lord looked right at him and said, "You Pharisees love to scrub the outside of your cups and plates clean, but your insides are stuffed with greed, meanness, and wickedness. You silly folks—didn't the One who made the outside make the inside, too? Instead of worrying about clean hands, share what you have with the poor, and suddenly everything about you is truly clean.

But watch out, you Pharisees! You are so picky that you count out tiny pinches of mint and garden herbs from your garden, but you completely forget to be kind, fair, and loving to God. You should definitely care about the little things, but never leave out the big things!

Watch out, you Pharisees! You love grabbing the fanciest front-row seats in the synagogues and hearing people bow and flatter you in the public square.

Watch out, you scribes and Pharisees—you total phonies! You're just like hidden graves covered in grass; people walk all over you every day without even realizing there is gross decay underneath."

One of the legal experts interrupted, "Teacher! When you say things like that, you're insulting us lawyers, too!"

Jesus turned to him and said, "Oh, you lawyers are in trouble, too! You pile crushing, heavy rules onto everyday people, but you won't even lift a single finger to help them carry the load.

Watch out! You build fancy, beautiful monuments for the prophets of old—the very same prophets your ancestors murdered! By building those monuments, you're practically signing your name to what your ancestors did: they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs.

That is why God's wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and they will hunt some down and hurt them.' Because of this, the people living today will be held responsible for all the innocent blood of the prophets spilled since the world began—from the blood of Abel all the way to the blood of Zechariah, who was murdered right between the altar and the temple. Yes, I'm telling you the truth: this generation will pay for it all.

And watch out, you lawyers! You stole the key to real knowledge. You refused to walk through the door yourselves, and you blocked the people who were trying to go in!"

As soon as Jesus said these things, the religious teachers and Pharisees grew furious. They started breathing fire, firing rapid-fire questions at him, and setting sneaky verbal traps. They lay in wait, hoping he would slip up and say something wrong so they could drag him away and arrest him.

LUKE 12

While all kinds of people crowded together—so many that they were practically stepping on each other's toes—Jesus first turned to his close friends and helpers. "Watch out for the sneaky ways of the Pharisees," he told them, "because their whole act is just fake.

"Don't worry, though, because everything kept secret will eventually come out in the open, and hidden things will be known. Whatever you whisper in the dark will soon be shouted from the rooftops!

"My friends, don't be afraid of people who can only hurt your body and can't do anything more. Instead, I'll tell you who to respect: respect the One who has the power to decide your eternal destiny. Yes, trust Him!

"Think about sparrows. You can buy five of them for just a couple of pennies, and yet God doesn't forget a single one of them! In fact, He even knows the exact number of hairs on your head. So don't be afraid; you are worth way more than a whole flock of birds!

"Here is my promise: if you are brave enough to stand up for me in front of others, the Son of Man will proudly acknowledge you before God's angels. But if you pretend you don't know me, you'll be

rejected up there just the same. And remember, if someone says something foolish against the Son of Man, that can be forgiven. But turning your back completely on the Holy Spirit is a different story—that won't be forgiven.

"When people drag you into court or before leaders, don't sit there stressing out about what smart speech to give. The Holy Spirit will give you the exact right words right when you need them!"

Suddenly, someone in the crowd shouted, "Teacher! Tell my brother to split our family inheritance with me!"

Jesus replied, "Mister, who made me a judge over you two?" Then he warned the whole crowd, "Be careful and stay away from greed! A person's true life isn't measured by how much cool stuff they own."

To help them understand, Jesus told a story: "Once, a very rich farmer had his land produce a massive, record-breaking harvest. He thought to himself, *'Oh no, what am I going to do? I don't have enough space to store all this crop!'* Then he smiled. *'I know! I'll tear down my old barns and build huge new ones, and I'll stash all my grain and luxury goods in them. Then I can kick back, relax, eat, drink, and party for years!'*

"But God said to him, *'You fool! Tonight is your very last night. Who is going to get all these fancy things you packed away?'*

"That's what happens to anyone who hoards piles of wealth for themselves instead of being rich toward God."

Turning back to his disciples, Jesus said, "So, I'm telling you: don't spend your days stressing over what you're going to eat or what

clothes you'll wear. Life is way more important than a sandwich, and your body is worth more than a fancy jacket!

"Look at the wild ravens. They don't plant seeds, they don't harvest crops, and they don't have pantries or refrigerators—yet God feeds them every single day! Aren't you worth so much more than birds? Besides, can any of you worry yourself an inch taller? If you can't even handle a tiny thing like that, why stress out over the big stuff?

"And look at the wild field lilies! They don't sweat or make clothes, but even King Solomon in all his royal sparkly gear wasn't dressed as nicely as one of them. If God takes that much care of grass that is here today and tossed into the fireplace tomorrow, won't he take care of *you*, you little-faiths?

"So stop obsessing over food and drink, and quit biting your nails with worry. The people who don't know God chase after all those things, but your heavenly Father already knows you need them. Instead, make God's kingdom your top priority, and all these everyday needs will be given to you as a bonus.

"Don't be afraid, little flock! Your Father is thrilled to give you the kingdom. Sell your extra stuff and give to the poor. Get yourself heavenly wallets that never wear out—a treasure up in the sky where thieves can't steal and moths can't chew. After all, wherever your treasure is, that's where your heart will be too!

"Always be ready, with your boots on and your lamps burning bright, like servants waiting up late for their master to return from a wedding party. When he finally knocks, they can open the door instantly. How happy those alert servants will be! Truly, I tell you, the master will flip the roles—he'll put on an apron, seat *them* at the

table, and serve *them* dinner! Whether he shows up in the middle of the night or right before dawn, those servants are blessed.

"Think about it: if a homeowner knew exactly what time a burglar was coming, they'd stay awake and protect their house. So you need to stay on your toes too, because the Son of Man is showing up when you least expect it."

Peter raised his hand and asked, "Lord, are you telling this story just to us, or to everyone?"

The Lord answered, "Think of a smart, trustworthy manager whom the boss puts in charge of the household to hand out food rations on time. That manager is super lucky if the boss comes home and catches him doing his job right! I'm telling you the truth, the boss will put him in charge of *everything* he owns.

"But what if that manager gets cocky and thinks, '*My boss is taking forever to get back,*' and starts acting like a bully to the other workers, throwing wild parties and getting messy-drunk? That boss is going to show up totally out of the blue, when the manager isn't looking at all, and severely punish him, placing him right alongside the worst rebels.

"A servant who knows what the boss wants, but refuses to get ready or do it, is going to get a heavy beating. But a servant who makes a mistake out of pure ignorance won't get punished as harshly. Much is expected from the person who has been given a lot, and even more will be demanded from the one trusted with great responsibility!

"I came to start a fire on earth, and how I wish it were already blazing! I have a tough trial to go through first, and I won't rest until it's finished. Do you think I came to bring peaceful, cozy vibes to earth? Nope, I'm telling you: I brought division! From now on, a family of five will be split—three against two, and two against three. Fathers and sons will argue, mothers and daughters will clash, and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law won't get along."

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds again. "When you see a storm cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'Here comes the rain!'—and you're right. When you feel a warm south wind blow, you say, 'It's going to be a scorcher!'—and it is. You total hypocrites! You can look at the weather and figure it out, but why can't you figure out what God is doing right now in your own times? Why can't you use your own good judgment to figure out what is right?"

"If someone is dragging you to court, do your best to settle things with them *on the way* there. Otherwise, they'll haul you before the judge, the judge will hand you over to the guard, and the guard will throw you straight in a jail cell. I'm telling you, you aren't getting out until you've paid every single penny!"

LUKE 13

At that moment, some people walked up to Jesus and told him a shocking piece of news: the Roman governor, Pilate, had violently killed some people from Galilee right while they were offering their sacrifices at the temple.

Jesus turned to the crowd and asked, "Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than everyone else just because this terrible thing happened to them? Not at all! But I'm telling you, unless you change your hearts and turn back to God, you will all face a similar destruction."

He gave them another example: "What about the eighteen people who died when the great tower at Siloam collapsed on them? Were they the most wicked people living in Jerusalem? Absolutely not! But unless you repent, you will all perish just like them."

To help them understand, Jesus told a story: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard. He went out looking for fruit on it, but found nothing. So he told the gardener, 'Look, for three years I've come looking for fruit on this tree and haven't found a single fig. Cut it down! Why should it waste good soil?'

"The gardener pleaded, 'Master, please give it one more year. Let me dig around the roots and put some rich fertilizer on it. If it bears fruit next year, that's wonderful. If not, then you can chop it down.'"

Another time, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. A woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years; her back was so hunched over that she couldn't stand up

straight at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Dear woman, you are finally free from your sickness!" He placed his hands on her, and instantly she stood up straight and began praising God.

The leader of the synagogue was furious that Jesus had performed a healing on the Sabbath. He angrily told the crowd, "There are six days of the week for working! Come and get healed on those days, not on the Sabbath!"

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't every single one of you untie your ox or donkey from the stall on the Sabbath and lead it out to get a drink? So why shouldn't this dear woman—a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has kept bound in sickness for eighteen long years—be set free from her chains on the Sabbath day?"

When he said this, all his enemies were left feeling very foolish and embarrassed, but the everyday crowds cheered and rejoiced at all the wonderful things he was doing.

Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What can I compare it to? It's just like a tiny mustard seed that a man planted in his garden. It grew and turned into a huge tree, and birds came and built nests in its branches."

He asked again, "What else is the kingdom of God like? It is like yeast that a woman mixed into a huge batch of flour, until the tiny bit of yeast made the whole batch rise."

As Jesus traveled through towns and villages on his way to Jerusalem, someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?"

Jesus told them, "Do your absolute best to get in through the narrow door, because many people will try to enter later and won't be able to. Once the homeowner gets up and locks the door, you will be left standing outside, knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will answer, 'I don't know where you're from.'

"Then you'll argue, 'But we ate and drank with you, and you taught right here in our streets!'

"Still he will reply, 'I tell you, I don't know you. Get away from me, all of you who do evil!'

"There will be a lot of crying and grinding of teeth when you look inside and see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets enjoying the kingdom of God, while you yourselves are thrown out. People will come from the east, west, north, and south to sit down at the feast in God's kingdom. And mark my words: some who are considered last now will be first then, and some who are first now will end up last."

Right around that time, some Pharisees came up to Jesus and warned him, "You need to get out of here right now! Herod wants to kill you."

Jesus replied, "Go tell that sly fox: 'Listen, I am going to keep driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work.' Still, I must keep walking today, tomorrow, and the next day—because it would be unthinkable for a prophet to be killed anywhere outside of Jerusalem!

"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you city that kills the prophets and throws stones at the messengers God sends you! How many times I

wanted to gather your children together just like a mother hen gathers her chicks safely under her wings, but you refused! Look, your house is being left totally empty and abandoned. And I tell you the truth, you won't see me again until the time comes when you finally shout, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

LUKE 14

One Sabbath day, Jesus went to have dinner at the home of a very important religious leader, and everyone there was watching him closely.

Right in front of Jesus stood a man whose body was swollen with fluid.

Jesus turned to the religious experts and teachers of the law, asking, "Is it okay to heal people on the Sabbath, or not?"

They stayed completely quiet. So Jesus gently touched the man, healed him, and sent him on his way home.

Then Jesus asked them, "If one of you has a donkey or an ox that falls into a deep ditch on a Sabbath, won't you pull it out immediately?"

And once again, they couldn't find a single word to say in reply.

Noticing how the invited guests were eagerly rushing to grab the best seats at the table, Jesus shared a helpful lesson with them.

"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, don't automatically sit in the seat of honor," he said. "What if a more important guest than you was also invited?"

"The host might come over and say, 'Excuse me, give this person your seat.' Then you would be super embarrassed as you had to move all the way to the very last, empty spot."

"Instead, when you arrive, go straight to the back and take the lowest seat. Then, when your host sees you, he might come over and say, 'My friend, come on up to a better seat!' What an honor that will be in front of everyone else eating with you."

"Remember this: whoever tries to show off and act proud will be humbled, but whoever is humble will be honored."

Then Jesus looked at the host who had invited him and added, "When you throw a lunch or a dinner party, don't just invite your rich friends, your brothers, your relatives, or your wealthy neighbors. If you do, they might just invite you back, and that will be your only reward."

"Instead, whenever you host a feast, invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, and the blind."

"You will be truly blessed because they can never pay you back. But you will be rewarded when the good people rise from the dead."

When one of the guests heard this, he piped up, "How happy is the person who gets to feast in God's kingdom!"

Jesus replied with a story: "A man once planned a massive banquet and invited a huge crowd."

"When dinner time finally arrived, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, 'Come on over, everything is ready for you!'"

"But one by one, they all started making excuses. The first one said, 'I just bought a field and I really need to go check it out. Please excuse me.'"

"Another said, 'I just bought five pairs of working oxen, and I'm on my way to test them out. Please excuse me.'"

"And a third said, 'I just got married, so there is no way I can come.'"

"So the servant went back and told his master everything. The master was furious and said, 'Hurry out into the streets and alleys of the city! Bring back the poor, the disabled, the blind, and those who cannot walk.'"

"Soon the servant reported, 'Sir, I did exactly what you commanded, but there is still plenty of empty space left.'"

"So the master told him, 'Go out along the country roads and country lanes, and urge people to come in so my house will be packed.'"

"Let me tell you something: not a single one of those original guests who made excuses will ever get a single bite of my supper!"

As huge crowds traveled along with Jesus, he turned around and spoke to them directly.

"If anyone wants to follow me, they must love me more than their father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even their own life. Otherwise, they cannot be my follower."

"Whoever refuses to carry their own cross and follow behind me cannot be my disciple."

"Just think about it: if one of you wants to build a tall watchtower, don't you sit down first and figure out how much it will cost to see if you have enough money to finish it?"

"Otherwise, if you lay the foundation and run out of money before you're done, everyone who sees it will start making fun of you."

"They will point and say, 'Look at that person! They started building, but were totally unable to finish the job.'"

"Or imagine a king getting ready to go to war against another king. Doesn't he sit down first to think carefully? He has to figure out if his army of ten thousand soldiers can defeat an enemy marching toward him with twenty thousand."

"If he realizes he can't win while the enemy is still far away, he will send messengers to ask for peace terms."

"In the exact same way, none of you can be my disciple unless you are willing to let go of everything you own."

"Salt is a wonderful thing, but if salt loses its salty flavor, how can you ever make it salty again?"

"It's completely useless for the soil or even for the compost pile; people just throw it out. If you have ears to truly listen, then pay attention!"

LUKE 15

One sunny day, a big crowd of outcasts and rule-breakers gathered around to hear Jesus teach.

Some strict religious leaders grumbled, "Look at him! He hangs out with the wrong crowd and even eats dinner with them!"

Hearing this, Jesus smiled and told them a story.

"Imagine a shepherd who owns a hundred sheep," Jesus said. "If one wanders off and gets lost, what does he do? Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine safely in the hills and search everywhere for the missing one until he finds it? And when he finally spots it, he scoops it up, hoists it onto his shoulders, and beams with joy! When he gets home, he calls all his neighbors together and cheers, 'Let's celebrate! I found my lost sheep!' I'm telling you, heaven throws an even bigger party when just one person decides to turn their life around than when ninety-nine good people don't think they need to."

Jesus didn't stop there. He shared another story: "Suppose a woman has ten shiny silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, grab a broom, sweep every corner of the house, and hunt high and low until she finds it? The moment she discovers it, she rounds up her friends and neighbors, shouting, 'Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!' In the exact same way, God's angels throw a joyful celebration over even one person who changes their heart."

Then Jesus told one more story—about a dad and his two boys.

The younger son marched up to his father and demanded, "Dad, give me my share of the family money right now!" So the father divided his money between them.

A few days later, the younger son packed up everything, caught a one-way ticket to a faraway country, and blew all his cash on wild, foolish parties.

Just as the money ran out, a terrible famine hit the land, leaving him with nothing to eat. Desperate to survive, he begged a local farmer for a job. The farmer sent him out into the muddy fields to feed pigs. The young man was so starving that even the smelly pig food looked delicious, but nobody would share a single bite with him.

Finally, he came to his senses. *What am I doing?* he thought. *Even the lowest workers back at my dad's house have more than enough bread to eat, and here I am starving to death! I will march right back to my father and tell him, "Dad, I've done wrong against God and I've done wrong by you. I'm not good enough to be called your son anymore—just treat me like one of your hired workers."*

So he jumped up and started the long walk home.

While he was still miles away, his father spotted him coming down the road. His heart flooded with love. He didn't wait for his son to reach him—he sprinted down the road, threw his arms around him, and covered him in hugs and kisses.

"Dad," the son stammered, "I've sinned against God and against you, and I'm not worthy to be your son—"

Before he could finish, the father interrupted and called to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the finest jacket and put it on him! Put a

ring on his finger and brand-new shoes on his feet! Go get the plumpest calf from the farm and butcher it! Tonight, we feast and celebrate, because my son was as good as dead, but now he's alive! He was lost, but now he's found!" And the whole house burst into joyous celebration.

Meanwhile, the older son was out working hard in the fields. As he walked toward the house, he heard the thump of music and the sound of laughing dancers. Puzzled, he grabbed a servant and asked what was going on.

"Your brother is back!" the servant beamed. "Your dad threw a huge welcome-home feast because he came back safe and sound."

The older brother slammed on the brakes. He was furious and refused to go inside.

Hearing the commotion, his father came outside and gently coaxed him.

"Look, Dad," the older son snapped, "I've worked my fingers to the bone for you all these years. I've never disobeyed a single rule. And have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Not even a little goat! But the second *this* son of yours comes home—after blowing your money on wild living—you slaughter the prize calf for him?!"

"My boy," the father said softly, putting a hand on his shoulder, "you are always right here with me, and everything I own is already yours. But we *had* to celebrate and be happy today. Because your brother was dead and is alive again. He was lost, and now he is found."

LUKE 16

Jesus once told His friends a story about a very wealthy man who had a manager to look after his money and property. One day, the rich man heard a bad report: the manager was wasting everything!

So, the boss called him in and said, "What is this I hear? Turn in your final report, because you're fired!"

The panicked manager thought to himself, *Oh no, what am I going to do? I'm not strong enough to do heavy farm work, and I'm way too proud to beg on the streets. I know what I'll do! When I lose my job, I'll make sure these people remember me kindly.*

So, he invited all the people who owed his boss money to come see him one by one. He asked the first person, "How much do you owe my master?" The man replied, "A hundred jars of olive oil." The manager quickly said, "Take your bill, sit down right now, and rewrite it for fifty!" Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" The man answered, "A hundred bags of wheat." The manager said, "Take your bill and write down eighty."

Even though the manager was sneaky, his boss actually had to smile at how clever he was. Jesus explained the lesson: people of the world are often much smarter about handling their everyday affairs than God's people are about spiritual things. The big takeaway? Use whatever worldly resources you have to do good and make friends, so that when your time on earth is done, you are welcomed into forever homes.

Jesus went on to teach a few more important truths. If you can be trusted with very small things, you can be trusted with big things. But if you cheat on the little things, you won't be trusted with the important ones. He reminded them, "No worker can serve two different bosses at the same time. You will either love one and hate the other, or be loyal to one and ignore the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Nearby, some greedy religious leaders overheard Jesus and laughed at Him. But Jesus looked right at them and said, "You love pretending to be good in front of people, but God looks right into your hearts. What people think is super cool and important is often gross and terrible to God." He also reminded them that God's eternal truth never changes, even if the whole universe passes away.

Then, Jesus told another unforgettable story—this one about two very different men.

There was a super-rich man who wore the fanciest purple clothes and threw huge, delicious parties every single day. At the same time, a poor, sick beggar named Lazarus was laid right outside the rich man's grand front gate. Lazarus was covered in sores and would have been happy just to eat the leftover crumbs falling off the rich man's dinner table. Even the stray dogs came by to lick his sores.

Eventually, the poor beggar died, and God's angels carried him away to a wonderful place of comfort next to Abraham, the father of faith. Soon after, the rich man also died and was buried.

Down in the place of the dead, suffering in terrible agony, the rich man looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus resting near him.

The rich man cried out, "Father Abraham! Have mercy on me! Please send Lazarus to dip just the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because these flames are hurting me so badly!"

Abraham gently answered, "Child, remember that during your life you had all the best things, while Lazarus had a really hard time. But now, he is comforted here, and you are in pain. Besides, there is a giant canyon between us that no one can cross, even if they wanted to."

The rich man pleaded, "Then please, Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my family's house! I have five brothers, and I don't want them to end up in this awful place of torment."

Abraham replied, "They have the teachings of Moses and the prophets. They should listen to those."

"No, Father Abraham!" the rich man begged. "If someone actually rises from the dead and goes to them, *then* they will finally turn their lives around and change."

But Abraham shook his head and said, "If they won't listen to God's word, they won't change their minds—not even if someone comes back to life right in front of them."

LUKE 17

Jesus told His friends, "Temptations and mean things will happen in the world, but it is terrible for the person who causes others to do wrong. You'd be much better off with a heavy rock tied around your

neck and being dropped in the deep ocean than hurting one of these little ones who trusts me.

"So, watch your step! If your friend does something wrong to you, gently talk to them about it. If they say sorry, forgive them. Even if they mess up and say sorry seven times in a single day, you must forgive them every single time."

Hearing this, the disciples said to the Lord, "Please, give us more faith!"

Jesus smiled and replied, "If you had even a tiny speck of faith—as small as a mustard seed—you could look at this big mulberry tree and say, 'Pull up your roots and plant yourself in the middle of the ocean,' and it would obey you!"

"Imagine one of you has a helper working in the fields or watching sheep. When the helper comes inside, do you say, 'Come right over and sit down for a nice meal'? Of course not! You'd say, 'Make me something to eat, put on your apron, and serve me. After I finish, you can have your dinner.' Do you give that servant a special medal just for doing what they were told? I don't think so. It's the same with you: when you've done everything you were asked to do, just say, 'We're just doing our normal job; we did what we were supposed to do.'"

As Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee on His way to Jerusalem, He came to a small village. Ten men with a serious skin disease stopped far away from Him and shouted, "Jesus! Master! Please have mercy on us!"

When Jesus saw them, He called out, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they hurried off, they looked at their hands and realized they were completely healed!

One of them, seeing that he was better, spun around and came back, shouting praises to God at the top of his lungs. He threw himself flat on the ground at Jesus' feet and thanked Him over and over. (And by the way, this thankful man was a Samaritan, an outsider.)

Jesus asked, "Weren't ten men healed? Where are the other nine? Only this foreigner came back to give glory to God?" Then Jesus said to the man, "Get up and go home. Your trust in me has made you well."

One day, some Pharisees rudely asked Jesus when God's kingdom was going to show up.

Jesus answered, "God's kingdom doesn't arrive with a flashy show you can point at. People won't be saying, 'Look, it's over here!' or 'Look, it's over there!' because God's kingdom is right inside your heart."

Then Jesus told His disciples, "A time is coming when you will desperately wish to see even one day of the Son of Man, but you won't. People will tell you, 'Look over there! See him here!' Don't chase after them or follow them. Just like a flash of lightning lights up the entire sky in a split second, that is how the Son of Man's day will suddenly appear. But first, He has to go through a lot of trouble and be rejected by the people alive today.

"Just like it was back in the days of Noah, it will be when the Son of Man returns. People were eating, drinking, and having big wedding parties right up until the day Noah stepped onto the boat—and then a giant flood swept everyone away.

"It was the exact same way in the days of Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building houses. But the very morning Lot ran out of the city of Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from the sky and destroyed them all.

"That is exactly what it will be like on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, if you are relaxing on your rooftop and your stuff is downstairs, don't waste time running inside to grab it. If you're working out in the garden, don't run back home. And always remember Lot's wife!"

Jesus added, "If you try to selfishly save your life, you'll lose it. But if you give up your life for others, you'll save it. I'm telling you, on that night, two people might be sleeping in the same bed—one will be taken up, and the other left behind. Two women might be grinding grain together—one taken, one left. Two men might be working in a field—one taken, one left."

The disciples asked, "Where is this going to happen, Lord?"

Jesus answered, "Wherever you see a flock of eagles gathering, that's where you'll find the meal."

LUKE 18

Jesus told a story to teach His friends never to give up on praying and to keep trusting.

"In a certain town," Jesus said, "there was a judge who didn't care about God and certainly didn't care what people thought of him. In that same town lived a widow who had a big problem with someone treating her unfairly. She kept going to the judge, begging him, 'Please protect me from my enemy!'

For a long time, the grumpy judge refused to help her. But finally, he thought to himself, *'I don't care about God, and I don't care about people. But this widow is driving me crazy! She won't stop showing up, so I'm going to give her what she wants just to get some peace and quiet!'*"

Jesus smiled and said, "Did you hear how the unfair judge finally helped her? Well, won't God make sure His chosen children are taken care of when they cry out to Him day and night? Won't He answer them? I promise you, He will answer them quickly! But the real question is: when the Son of Man comes back, will He find people who still believe and trust in Him?"

Next, Jesus told a story specifically for people who thought they were better than everyone else and looked down on others.

"Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a religious leader, a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector, someone nobody liked. The Pharisee stood proudly by himself and prayed loudly: 'God, I thank You that I am not a crook, a cheat, or a bad person like

everyone else—and especially not like that tax collector over there! I fast and skip meals twice a week, and I give a tenth of everything I earn to You!

Meanwhile, the tax collector stood far away in the corner. He couldn't even bring himself to look up at the sky. Instead, he gently beat his chest in sadness and whispered, 'Oh God, please have mercy on me. I am a sinner.'

"I'm telling you the truth," Jesus said. "It was the tax collector who went home forgiven and right with God, not the proud Pharisee. Because anyone who puffs themselves up will be knocked down, but anyone who humbles themselves will be lifted up."

Soon, people started bringing their tiny babies to Jesus so He could gently touch them and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents, saying, "Go away! Jesus is too busy for babies."

When Jesus saw this, He was upset with His disciples. He called the children over and said, "Let the little children come to me! Don't stop them, because God's kingdom belongs to people who are just like them. I'm telling you the truth: if you don't accept God's kingdom with the pure, trusting heart of a little child, you won't be able to get in at all."

Right after that, a wealthy ruler ran up to Jesus, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what amazing thing do I need to do to live forever?"

Jesus looked at him and said, "Why do you call Me good? Only God is truly good. But you know the rules: Don't cheat on your spouse,

don't murder, don't steal, don't lie, and always honor your father and mother."

The man beamed and said, "Teacher, I've obeyed every single one of those rules since I was a little kid!"

When Jesus heard that, He looked at him with great love and said, "You are so close, but you still lack one thing. Go sell everything you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have a huge treasure waiting for you in heaven. Then, come back and be My follower."

When the rich man heard that, his smile vanished. He turned away with a heavy heart, completely devastated, because he was super-rich and loved his stuff.

Watching him walk away, Jesus sighed and told His friends, "It is so hard for rich people to enter God's kingdom! In fact, it's easier for a giant camel to squeeze through the tiny eye of a sewing needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

The disciples gasped. "Oh no! If rich people can't do it, who on earth can be saved?!"

Jesus looked right at them and smiled. "Things that are totally impossible for humans are completely possible with God."

Peter spoke up, saying, "Master, remember us? We left our homes, our families, everything we had, just to follow You!"

Jesus nodded warmly. "I promise you," He said, "anyone who leaves behind their house, parents, brothers, wife, or children for the sake of God's kingdom will get so much more than they gave up—both right now in this life, and forever in the world to come."

Then Jesus pulled His twelve closest friends aside. "Listen closely," He told them quietly. "We are heading up to Jerusalem right now. Everything the ancient prophets wrote about the Son of Man is about to happen. He is going to be handed over to people who don't care about God. They are going to make fun of Him, insult Him, spit on Him, whip Him, and finally, they are going to kill Him. But don't be afraid—on the third day, He will rise back to life!"

The disciples just stared at Him, completely confused. They had no idea what He was talking about. The meaning was totally hidden from them.

As they got close to the town of Jericho, a blind man was sitting beside the dusty road, begging for coins. Hearing the loud crowd walking past, he asked what all the excitement was about.

"Jesus of Nazareth is walking by!" someone shouted back.

The blind man's eyes widened, and he screamed out at the top of his lungs, "Jesus! Son of David! Please have mercy on me!"

The people walking at the front of the crowd shushed him angrily. "Be quiet! Stop shouting!"

But the blind man just yelled even louder, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Suddenly, Jesus stopped dead in His tracks. "Bring him here to Me," He commanded.

When the blind man was brought close, Jesus smiled and asked him gently, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

"Lord," the man breathed, "I just want to see."

Jesus looked at him and said, "Open your eyes and see! Your amazing trust and faith have healed you."

Snap! Just like that, the blind man's eyes popped open, and he could see bright colors, blue skies, and smiling faces for the very first time! He jumped up and followed Jesus down the road, shouting praises to God at the top of his lungs. And when the rest of the crowd saw the miracle, they all cheered and praised God right along with him!

LUKE 19

Jesus was walking right through the busy town of Jericho. A very rich man named Zacchaeus lived there, and he was the head tax collector—which meant people in town didn't like him very much.

Zacchaeus was super curious to see what Jesus looked like, but he was very short, and a massive crowd of people was blocking his view. So, what did he do? He sprinted ahead of the crowd and scrambled right up a sycamore tree just to get a peek as Jesus walked past!

When Jesus reached the tree, he stopped, looked straight up, and called out, "Zacchaeus, hurry down! I'm coming over to stay at your house today!"

Zacchaeus scrambled down as fast as he could and welcomed Jesus with a huge, happy smile. But the crowd started grumbling, "Why is Jesus going to eat at the house of such a sinner?"

Knowing what they were saying, Zacchaeus stood tall and told the Lord, "Look, I'm going to give half of my money to the poor. And if I've ever cheated anyone out of anything, I'll pay them back four times as much!"

Jesus smiled and said, "Salvation has come to this home today! After all, the Son of Man came to seek out and rescue the lost."

Because they were getting close to Jerusalem, and everyone thought God's kingdom was going to pop up right then and there, Jesus told them a story.

"Once upon a time, a nobleman traveled to a far-away country to be crowned king and then return," Jesus explained. "Before he left, he gathered ten of his servants, handed each of them a bag of money, and told them, 'Put this money to work until I get back.'"

"Now, the people in his hometown hated him and sent messengers to say, 'We refuse to let this man rule over us!'"

"Well, the man *did* become king, and when he returned, he called his servants in to see how much profit they had made. The first servant stepped forward and said, 'Master, your money earned ten times more!' The king was thrilled and told him, 'Fantastic! You've been trustworthy with a little, so now you're in charge of ten cities!'"

"The second servant came and said, 'Master, your money earned five times as much.' The king replied, 'Great job, you take charge of five cities.'"

"Then another servant stepped up and said, 'Master, here is your money. I kept it safe wrapped up in a cloth. I was terrified of you"

because you're such a strict man—you collect things you didn't store up and harvest crops you didn't plant.'

"The king shook his head and said, 'You lazy and wicked servant! You knew I was strict, so why didn't you at least put my money in the bank so it could earn some interest?' Then he turned to the guards and commanded, 'Take the money away from him and give it to the servant who has ten bags!' (The people watching gasped, 'Um, Master, he already *has* ten bags!') But the king explained, 'To everyone who uses what they have, more will be given. But as for the one who does nothing, even what little he has will be snatched away. And as for those enemies of mine who didn't want me to be king—bring them here and get rid of them right in front of me!'"

After telling this story, Jesus kept walking, leading the way up toward Jerusalem. When they got near Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ahead with a special mission.

"Go into the village right ahead of you," Jesus told them. "As soon as you walk in, you'll find a young colt tied up that no one has ever ridden yet. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Hey, why are you untying my colt?' just tell them, 'The Lord needs it.'"

The two disciples hurried off and found everything exactly as Jesus had said. Sure enough, as they were untying the colt, the owners asked, "Why are you untying that?"

They answered just like Jesus told them to: "The Lord needs it."

So they brought the colt to Jesus, threw their coats over its back, and helped him hop on. As Jesus rode along, people cheerfully tossed their coats onto the dirt road like a red carpet!

When he finally reached the place where the path starts down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples burst into loud cheers, praising God for all the amazing miracles they had seen.

"God bless the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" they shouted. "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some Pharisees in the crowd muttered, "Teacher, tell your disciples to quiet down!"

Jesus chuckled and replied, "I'm telling you, if they keep quiet, these very rocks along the road will start cheering!"

As Jesus drew closer and got a good look at the city of Jerusalem, he started to cry.

"If only you knew today what brings true peace!" Jesus whispered. "But right now, it's hidden from your eyes. Days are coming when your enemies will build walls all around you, trap you in from every side, and crush you and your children to the ground. They won't leave a single stone stacked on top of another, all because you didn't recognize the wonderful time when God came to visit you."

Then Jesus went straight into the temple and began chasing out the people selling and buying things inside. "The Scriptures say, 'My house is a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a hideout for robbers!" he declared.

From then on, Jesus taught people in the temple every single day. The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the leaders of the people were furious and wanted him dead. But they couldn't figure out a way to do it, because the crowds hung on his every word and refused to leave his side!

LUKE 20

One busy day, Jesus was standing in the big temple, teaching the crowd and sharing wonderful news. Suddenly, a group of grumpy religious leaders—the chief priests, scribes, and elders—marched right up to him.

"Hey!" they demanded, crossing their arms. "Who gave you the right to do and say all these things? Who put you in charge?"

Jesus smiled and said, "I'll make a deal with you. Answer my question first: When John the Baptist baptized people, was that a power from heaven, or just made up by humans?"

The leaders huddled together to whisper. *"Wait a minute,"* one muttered. *"If we say it was from heaven, he'll ask why we didn't believe John. But if we say it was just from humans, the angry crowd will throw rocks at us because everyone loved John and thought he was a prophet!"*

Sweating a little, they turned back to Jesus and lied, "We don't know."

Jesus shrugged. "Then I won't tell you who gave me my authority, either."

Then, Jesus told them a story. "Once upon a time, a man planted a gorgeous vineyard, rented it out to some farmers, and went on a long trip. When harvest time came, he sent a servant to collect his share

of the grapes. But the mean farmers beat the servant up and sent him back empty-handed!

"So the owner sent a second servant. They beat him up too, treated him terribly, and chased him off. A third servant got the exact same treatment—wounded and thrown out.

"Finally, the owner said, 'What should I do? I know! I'll send my very own son. They'll surely respect him.'

"But when the wicked farmers saw the son coming, they whispered to each other, 'Look, here's the rich guy's heir! Let's murder him, and the whole vineyard will be ours!' So they dragged him out and killed him. Now, what do you think the owner of the vineyard is going to do to those terrible farmers?"

Jesus answered his own question: "He will come, get rid of those farmers, and give the vineyard to people who will actually do a good job!"

The crowd gasped, "Oh no, let it not happen!"

Jesus looked right at the leaders and asked, "Haven't you ever read the Scripture that says: '*The stone that the builders threw away has become the most important stone of all*'? Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be bruised, but anyone it falls on will be crushed into dust!"

The religious leaders realized right then that Jesus was talking about *them* in this story. They wanted to arrest him on the spot, but they were too afraid of the crowd.

So, they hatched a sneaky plan. They sent some spies to pretend they were super friendly and honest. Their mission was to trap Jesus

into saying something wrong so they could hand him over to the Roman governor to be punished.

The spies walked up with big fake smiles. "Teacher," they buttered him up, "we know you always tell the absolute truth, you don't play favorites, and you teach God's way correctly. So tell us: Is it right for us to pay taxes to the wicked Roman Emperor Caesar, or not?"

Jesus saw right through their sneaky trick. "You hypocrites, why are you trying to test me?" he asked. "Show me a coin used for taxes."

They handed him a small silver coin.

"Whose picture and name are stamped on this?" Jesus asked.

"Caesar's," they replied.

Jesus grinned. "Well then! Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that belong to God."

The spies were totally speechless. They couldn't trap him at all. Amazed by his clever answer, they walked away in silence.

Next, a different group came to try their luck: the Sadducees. They didn't believe people could ever come back to life after dying. They brought up a really wacky puzzle:

"Teacher, Moses wrote that if a man dies without kids, his brother has to marry the widow to keep the family name going. Well, there were seven brothers. The first got married and died with no kids. The second married her, and he died childless too. The third took her, and so on down the line until all seven brothers had married her and died! Finally, the woman died as well. So here's our puzzle: In the

afterlife, when people wake up, whose wife will she be? All seven of them had her!"

Jesus laughed a little at their silly question. "People in this world get married," he explained. "But those who are found worthy to live again after the resurrection won't marry at all. They will be like bright angels! They can't ever die again because they belong to God. And even Moses proved that the dead live again—remember when he talked about God being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the burning bush? God is not the God of dead people, but of living people, because to Him, everyone is alive!"

Some of the teachers of the law standing nearby clapped and said, "Well answered, Teacher!" After that, nobody dared ask him another trick question.

Then, Jesus turned the tables and asked them a puzzle of his own: "How can people say that the great King David's promised savior is just David's son? David himself wrote in the Psalms: *'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'* If David calls him 'Lord,' how can he also be David's son?"

Nobody could answer.

Finally, with everyone listening, Jesus turned to his disciples and gave them a warning: "Watch out for the fancy religious leaders! They love strutting around in long robes, soaking up fancy greetings in the marketplace, grabbing the best seats in the temple, and taking the VIP tables at parties. But behind closed doors, they trick widows out of their homes and put on a fake show of praying for hours. Because of that, they are going to get the biggest trouble of all!"

LUKE 21

Jesus sat quietly by the temple's big collection box, watching people drop in their money. Wealthy people walked up and tossed in heavy bags of gold coins with a big show.

Then, a very poor widow quietly stepped up. She dropped in just two tiny, little copper coins—barely worth anything at all.

Jesus smiled gently and called His friends close. "Listen to Me," He whispered. "That poor woman just gave way more than everyone else combined! The rich people only gave away extra money they didn't even need. But she gave all she had left to live on."

Later, some people were pointing out how gorgeous the temple looked, bragging about its giant, beautiful stones and fancy decorations.

Jesus shook His head. "Enjoy it while it lasts," He said. "Someday, every single one of these stones will be knocked down until not a single one is left stacked on top of another."

His friends' eyes went wide. "Teacher! When is that going to happen? What warning sign should we look for?"

Jesus leaned in and warned them, "Don't let anyone trick you. Lots of phonies are going to show up shouting, 'I am the Savior! The end is here!' Do not follow them. And when you hear terrifying news about wars and riots, don't panic. Those things have to happen first, but the end won't happen immediately."

He explained that countries would fight countries, massive earthquakes would shake the ground, and food shortages and weird, spooky things would happen in the sky.

"Before all that even starts," Jesus added softly, "people are going to grab you, drag you into court, and put you in prison just because you follow Me. But don't you worry about what to say when you're on trial! I will give you the exact right words and cleverness that your enemies won't be able to argue against or stop. Even your own family and friends might turn against you and betray you, and some of you might even be hurt. Everyone will hate you because of Me. But I promise you, not a single hair on your head will be permanently lost. Stay strong, keep your cool, and trust Me."

He told them that when they finally saw foreign armies surrounding Jerusalem, they would know trouble was right at the doorstep. "If you're living in that area, run for the mountains immediately! Get out of the city! Those will be days of great punishment where everything written long ago will finally happen. How hard it will be for mothers nursing babies in those days! People will be killed or dragged off as prisoners, and Jerusalem will be trampled by outsiders until their time is up."

Jesus looked up and painted a picture of the future: "There will be wild signs in the sun, moon, and stars. Down on Earth, nations will be totally stressed out and confused, listening to the roaring ocean waves. People will faint from pure terror just thinking about what is coming next, because the powers of the heavens will be shaking. And *then*—everyone will see the Son of Man coming down on a cloud, shining with awesome power and glory!"

He smiled and gave them a message of hope: "When all these scary things start happening, don't hide—stand up tall and lift your heads high! Your rescue is finally here."

Then He told them a simple story: "Look at a fig tree, or any tree for that matter. When you see new green leaves sprouting out, you instantly know summer is right around the corner. It's the same thing. When you see all these wild things happening, you'll know God's new world is about to arrive. Trust Me, the people living right now will see all of this come true. The sky and the Earth might disappear one day, but My words will *never* disappear."

Jesus gave them one final warning: "Don't let yourselves get sluggish, lazy, or distracted by partying and the everyday worries of life, or that day will catch you totally by surprise—just like a trap snapping shut on animals everywhere around the world. So stay awake! Pray all the time so you have the strength to escape all these bad things and stand proudly before the Son of Man."

During those days, Jesus spent His time teaching in the busy temple courtyard. But every single evening, He would walk out of the city to spend the night sleeping peacefully on the Mount of Olives.

And every single morning, before the sun was even fully up, crowds of people would hurry back to the temple just to listen to Him teach.

LUKE 22

The special holiday called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the Passover, was almost here. The religious leaders and teachers were very angry and looked for a secret way to get rid of Jesus, but they were afraid of what the large crowds might do.

Right around that time, a dark shadow came over Judas—one of the twelve close disciples, also known as Iscariot. Judas slipped away and met with the chief priests and temple guards to figure out how he could hand Jesus over to them. They were thrilled and promised to pay him money. Judas agreed and started watching for a quiet moment to betray Jesus when no crowds were around.

Soon, the exact day of the Passover arrived, the time when the holiday lamb had to be prepared. Jesus turned to Peter and John and said, “Go make dinner ready for us so we can share the Passover meal together.”

“Where would you like us to prepare it?” they asked.

Jesus smiled and told them, “As soon as you walk into the city, you will see a man carrying a jug of water. Follow him straight to the house he enters. Speak to the owner of the house and say, ‘The Teacher wants to know where the guest room is, so he can eat the Passover with his disciples.’ He will lead you upstairs to a large, furnished room. Get everything ready there.”

Peter and John went into the city and found everything just as Jesus had said. They got the Passover meal completely ready.

When the right time finally came, Jesus sat at the table, and all twelve apostles joined him. He looked around the table and said, “I have wanted so much to eat this special meal with you before my time of suffering begins. I want you to know that I won't eat this meal again until God's kingdom comes in its full power.”

Then Jesus picked up a cup, gave thanks to God, and said, “Take this and pass it around. I won't drink juice from the vine again until God's kingdom arrives.”

Next, he took a loaf of bread, thanked God, broke it into pieces, and handed it to them. “This is my body, given for you,” he explained. “Do this to remember me.”

After dinner, he lifted the cup again and said, “This cup represents the brand-new promise from God, sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you. But look—the hand of the one who is going to betray me is sitting right here with me at this table. The Son of Man is going just as it was planned, but how terrible it will be for the person who betrays him!”

Hearing this, the disciples started whispering to one another, wondering which of them could possibly do such a terrible thing.

Right after that, a silly argument broke out among the disciples about which one of them was the greatest. Jesus gently corrected them: “Kings of other nations boss their people around, and the ones in charge like to be called important titles. But you must not act like that! The greatest among you should act like the youngest, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important—the one sitting down eating, or the one serving the food? Obviously, the one eating! Yet, here I am among you as someone who serves. You

guys have stayed by my side through all my hard times. Because of that, I am promising you a kingdom, just like my Father promised me one. You will get to eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones helping to lead the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Then Jesus looked specifically at Simon Peter and said, “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has asked to test all of you, shaking you up like wheat in a sifter. But I have prayed specially for you, Peter, so that your faith won't completely give out. And once you have turned back to me, make sure you strengthen your brothers.”

Peter proudly declared, “Lord, I am ready to go with you anywhere—even to prison, even to death!”

Jesus shook his head and said, “Peter, I’m telling you the truth: before the rooster crows this morning, you will pretend you don't even know me three different times.”

Jesus then asked them, “When I sent you out before without any money, bags, or extra shoes, did you lack anything?”

“Not a single thing,” they replied.

“Well, things are different now,” Jesus told them. “If you have a money bag or a travel bag, take it with you. And if you don't own a sword, sell your coat and buy one. The Scriptures say, ‘He was listed with the criminals,’ and that prophecy must come true for me right now.”

The disciples looked around and said, “Lord, look! We have two swords right here.”

Jesus simply answered, “That is enough.”

When dinner was over, Jesus walked out to the Mount of Olives, just like he always did, and his disciples followed him. When they reached the quiet spot, he told them, “Pray so that you won't give in to temptation.”

Jesus walked just a little bit further away—about as far as you could throw a stone—knelt down, and started to pray. “Father,” he whispered, “if you are willing, please take this difficult suffering away from me. But more than anything, I want your will to be done, not mine.”

Suddenly, an angel from heaven appeared to give him strength. Being in such deep distress, Jesus prayed even harder, and his sweat fell to the ground looking like heavy drops of blood. When he finally finished praying, he stood up and walked back to his disciples, only to find them fast asleep because they were so exhausted and sad.

“Why are you sleeping?” he asked them gently. “Get up and pray so you don't fall into temptation.”

While he was still speaking, a large crowd of people marched up. Leading the way was Judas, one of the twelve disciples. He stepped right up to Jesus to give him a friendly kiss on the cheek.

Jesus looked at him and said, “Judas, are you really going to betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”

When the disciples around Jesus saw what was happening, they panicked and asked, “Lord, should we attack them with our swords?”

Right away, one of them swung a sword and sliced off the right ear of the high priest's servant.

Jesus stepped in and said, “Stop! No more of this.” He reached out, touched the servant's ear, and healed him instantly.

Then Jesus spoke directly to the chief priests, temple guards, and elders who had come to arrest him: “Why did you come out here with swords and clubs as if I were a dangerous criminal? Day after day I sat right there teaching in the temple with you, and you never laid a hand on me. But this is your moment—the time when darkness rules.”

So they grabbed Jesus, tied him up, and led him away to the high priest’s house. Peter followed closely behind, but kept a safe distance away.

In the middle of the courtyard, the guards built a fire and sat down around it to stay warm. Peter walked over and sat down right in the middle of them.

A servant girl looked closely at him by the firelight and said, “Hey, this man was with Jesus!”

Peter quickly shook his head and lied, “Woman, I don't even know him!”

A little while later, someone else spotted Peter and said, “You’re one of them too!”

“No, man, I am not!” Peter argued.

About an hour later, another person insisted, “I am completely sure this guy was with him. He’s a Galilean—you can tell by the way he talks!”

Peter threw up his hands and shouted, “Man, I have no idea what you are talking about!”

The very second those words left his mouth, a rooster crowed.

The Lord turned around and looked straight across the courtyard at Peter. In a flash, Peter remembered what the Lord had told him earlier: *Before the rooster crows today, you will deny knowing me three times.*

Peter ran outside into the dark and cried bitterly.

Meanwhile, the men guarding Jesus started making fun of him and beating him up. They put a blindfold over his eyes, punched him in the face, and taunted, “Hey, if you're such a great prophet, tell us—who just hit you?” They shouted many other mean and insulting things at him.

As soon as morning broke, the elders of the people, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law all gathered together. They brought Jesus into their official meeting room and demanded, “If you are the Christ, tell us!”

Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you won't believe me. And if I ask you a question, you won't answer me or let me go. But from now on, the Son of Man will be sitting at the right hand of the almighty God.”

They all shouted together, “So, are you claiming to be the Son of God?”

Jesus replied, “You are saying that I am.”

Then they cheered, “We don't need any more witnesses! We heard it right out of his own mouth.”

LUKE 23

Early in the morning, a huge crowd of people stood up and led Jesus away to the Roman governor, a man named Pilate.

The people shouted out charges against Jesus. "We caught this troublemaker turning our nation upside down!" they yelled. "He tells people not to pay taxes to Caesar, and he claims he is Christ, a king!"

Pilate looked at Jesus and asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus smiled gently and replied, "That is what you say."

Then Pilate turned to the chief priests and the crowd and announced, "I cannot find a single thing this man did wrong."

Hearing this, the crowd grew even wilder and more furious. "He is stirring up trouble everywhere," they shouted, "starting all the way from Galilee right down to this very city!"

When Pilate heard the word "Galilee," he stopped. *Is this man from Galilee?* he wondered. As soon as he realized Jesus came from the region ruled by King Herod, Pilate sent Jesus straight to Herod, who happened to be visiting Jerusalem at that time.

King Herod was thrilled to see Jesus! He had wanted to meet him for a long, long time because he had heard so many amazing stories. Herod was hoping Jesus would perform a cool magic trick or miracle right in front of him. Herod asked him question after question, but Jesus didn't say a single word. Meanwhile, the chief priests and

religious teachers stood nearby, shouting angry accusations at the top of their lungs.

Disappointed, Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus terribly. They made fun of him, dressed him up in a flashy, royal-looking robe, and sent him back to Pilate. Interestingly, that very day, Pilate and Herod became good friends—before that, they hadn't gotten along at all!

Pilate called the chief priests, leaders, and the crowd back together. "You brought this man to me, accusing him of turning the people against the government," Pilate said. "I questioned him right in front of you, and I found him completely innocent of your charges. And neither did Herod, since I sent you to him, and he didn't give him the death penalty either. So, I will just whip him a little bit and let him go free."

(By tradition, the governor had to release one prisoner to the people during the big festival.)

At once, the entire crowd roared like a wave, "No! Get rid of this man! Give us Barabbas instead!" (Barabbas was a criminal who had started a riot in the city and committed murder.)

Pilate really wanted to set Jesus free, so he tried talking to them again. But they screamed back, "Crucify him! Crucify him on a cross!"

For a third time, Pilate pleaded with them, "Why? What terrible crime has he done? I haven't found anything he deserves to die for. I'll punish him and let him go."

But they wouldn't stop. They shouted louder and louder, demanding that Jesus be crucified. In the end, the angry crowd and the priests

got their way. Pilate gave in to their wishes, released the murderer Barabbas, and handed Jesus over to them to do whatever they wanted with him.

As the soldiers led Jesus away to be crucified, they grabbed a man named Simon, who was visiting from the countryside town of Cyrene. They forced Simon to carry the heavy wooden cross behind Jesus.

A huge crowd followed them, including many women who were crying and mourning for Jesus.

Jesus turned around and looked at them. "Daughters of Jerusalem," he said, "don't cry for me. Cry for yourselves and for your children. The days are coming when people will say, 'How lucky are the ones who never had children!' People will beg the mountains to fall on them and the hills to hide them. If people treat me—a green, living tree—this badly, imagine how terrible things will be for the dry, dead wood!"

Two other criminals were also led out to be executed along with Jesus.

When they reached a place called Calvary (which means "The Skull"), the soldiers crucified Jesus. They hung the two criminals on crosses too—one on his right side and one on his left.

Even while hanging on the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing."

The soldiers played a game to divide up his clothes, rolling dice for them. The crowd stood watching. The Jewish leaders laughed and

mocked him, saying, "He saved other people! Let's see him save *himself* if he's really the chosen Christ of God!"

The Roman soldiers made fun of him too. They walked right up to him, offered him sour wine to drink, and jeered, "If you're the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

Above Jesus' head, the soldiers nailed a sign written in three languages—Greek, Latin, and Hebrew—that read: **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

One of the criminals hanging beside him yelled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and save us, too!"

But the other criminal turned and scolded him. "Don't you fear God?" he said. "You're getting the exact same punishment we are. We're getting what we deserve for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong!"

Then he looked at Jesus and whispered, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus looked at him with kindness and said, "I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise."

By now it was around noon, but suddenly, the sky went completely black. Darkness covered the whole land until three o'clock in the afternoon because the sun stopped shining. At the same time, the giant curtain hanging inside the temple ripped right down the middle, from top to bottom.

Then Jesus shouted in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I put my spirit!" And with that final breath, he passed away.

When the Roman army captain saw everything that had happened, he praised God and said, "This really was a good and innocent man."

All the crowds who had gathered to watch the spectacle beat their chests in sadness and walked back home. Meanwhile, all of Jesus' close friends—including the women who had followed him all the way from Galilee—stood far back, watching everything with heavy hearts.

Just then, a good and fair man named Joseph stepped forward. He was a Jewish council leader from the town of Arimathea who was eagerly waiting for God's kingdom, and he had *not* agreed with the evil plan to kill Jesus.

Joseph bravely went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate agreed. Joseph took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him carefully in clean linen cloth, and laid him in a brand-new tomb that had been freshly carved out of solid rock—a tomb where no one had ever been buried before.

It was Friday, the day before the Sabbath, and the special day of rest was about to begin.

The women who had traveled with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph. They saw the tomb and watched closely to see how his body was placed inside. Then they rushed home to quickly prepare sweet spices and fragrant oils before the sun went down.

When the Sabbath arrived, they rested quietly all day long, just as the commandment required.

LUKE 24

Early on Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and a few other friends walked to Jesus' tomb carrying sweet-smelling spices. But when they got there, the heavy stone door had been rolled away!

They stepped inside, but Jesus' body was gone. The women stood there, confused and worried. Suddenly, two men in clothes as bright as lightning appeared beside them.

Terrified, the women bowed their faces to the ground.

"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" the two men asked. "He isn't here; He has risen! Remember what He told you back in Galilee—that the Son of Man had to be handed over to sinners, crucified, and rise again on the third day?"

Suddenly, they remembered His words! The women hurried back to tell the eleven disciples and all the others the amazing news. But the apostles thought the women were just telling silly stories and didn't believe them.

Peter, however, jumped up and sprinted to the tomb. He bent down and peered inside, seeing only the linen burial cloths lying empty. He walked away, shaking his head in absolute wonder.

Later that same day, two of the disciples were walking to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked and talked about everything that had happened, a stranger joined them and started walking alongside them. But somehow, God kept their eyes from recognizing who He was.

"What are you guys talking about as you walk, looking so sad?" Jesus asked.

One of them, named Cleopas, stopped and stared at Him. "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know what's happened these past few days?"

"What things?" Jesus asked with a smile.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a powerful prophet in what He did and said before God and all the people. But our leading priests and rulers handed Him over to be condemned to death and crucified Him. We had hoped He was the one who was going to rescue Israel! Plus, today is already the third day since it happened. Some women from our group went to the tomb early this morning and shocked us. They couldn't find His body, and they came back saying they'd seen a vision of angels who told them He is alive! Some of our friends went to check, and it was just like the women said—the tomb was empty, but they didn't see Him."

Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! Why are you so slow to believe everything the prophets wrote? Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things before entering His glory?"

Starting with the books of Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them everything in the Scriptures about Himself.

As they reached Emmaus, Jesus acted as if He was going to keep walking. But they begged Him, "Stay with us! It's getting late, and the day is almost over." So He went inside to stay with them.

As they sat down to eat, Jesus picked up the bread, thanked God for it, broke it, and handed it to them.

Right then, their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him! But the moment they saw Him, He vanished right out of their sight.

They looked at each other in amazement. "Weren't our hearts burning inside us while He talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures?"

They didn't wait. Even though it was late, they jumped right back up, rushed all the way back to Jerusalem, and found the eleven apostles and the rest of the group gathered together.

"The Lord really has risen!" the group shouted. "He appeared to Simon!"

Then the two travelers told the story of how Jesus had walked with them on the road and how they recognized Him when He broke the bread.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus Himself suddenly appeared right in the middle of the room!

"Peace be with you," He said.

They were so terrified and startled that they thought they were seeing a ghost!

"Why are you so frightened?" Jesus asked them. "Why are you letting doubts fill your minds? Look at My hands and My feet. It's really Me! Touch Me and see. Ghosts don't have flesh and bones like you see I have."

He showed them His hands and feet. They were so filled with joy and wonder that they still almost couldn't believe it.

"Do you have anything here to eat?" He asked.

They gave Him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. He took it and ate it right in front of them!

Then Jesus said, "Remember when I told you, while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to come true?"

He opened their minds so they could finally understand the Scriptures.

"This is what was written," He told them. "The Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. And the message that people can be forgiven and turn back to God must be preached in His name to all nations, starting right here in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of all these things."

Jesus continued, "And now I will send you what My Father promised. But stay here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Then Jesus led them out to the town of Bethany. He lifted His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He was parted from them and taken up into heaven!

With great joy, they worshiped Him and then headed back to Jerusalem. From that moment on, they spent all their time at the temple, continually praising and thanking God. Amen.