

January 2024 Bible Study

Deeply Rooted: Journaling

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Prior to her retirement, College for Officer Training Officer, Major Millie Bearchell, shared a testimony about her excitement as she began planning her new ministry with her future congregation. In this testimony, she shared that one of her most prized possessions is a journal written by her late mother. This love for journal writing was passed on from her mom to her as journaling became an important part of her daily quiet time with the Lord. When entering retirement, Major Millie planned to continue journaling, and instead of just writing in her own journal, she committed to ministering to her new congregation – her 6 grandchildren – by starting individual journals for each of them to one day receive at a still-to-be-determined time. What a beautiful ministry!

Share Your Experience: Do you enjoy journaling? If so, describe what you include in your journal. What are some important things that you record? Prayers? Prayer requests? Prayer victories? Daily thoughts? Recording of daily events? Poems? Quotes? Drawings? Do you share these journals with others?

In her book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun includes a chapter on the spiritual discipline of journaling. She defines journaling as “a tool for reflecting God’s presence, guidance and nurture in daily comings and goings.” Journaling is an effective spiritual discipline that many choose to do to draw themselves closer to the Lord as they articulate how God has been moving, what He has been teaching, and how He continues to be faithful. Journaling gives us an opportunity to sit, meditate, listen, and to write what is on our hearts as we reflect and remember. Calhoun states, “This practice includes keeping a written record of God’s ways in your life.”

For today’s Bible Study, we will be looking at passages of Scripture from an author who loved to keep a written record of God’s ways in various people’s lives. In fact, his journals gave us two New Testament books - the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Let’s turn to Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2 to see who this author is and what he wrote.

Read Luke 1:1-4.

1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

The writer is Luke, who was a physician by trade (Colossians 4:14), which meant that he certainly focused on details. Luke is mentioned in Philemon 24 as a fellow worker of the Apostle Paul, joining him on some of his missionary journeys. In this passage, we can see how and why Luke wrote his Gospel.

In **verses 1 and 2**, Luke states that there were many who wrote about the things that Jesus did and said as writers unfolded the Lord’s life and ministry as the Messiah. He also shares that the gospel was

handed down to them by those who walked with and talked with the Lord. These eyewitnesses saw with their very own eyes what Jesus did, and heard with their ears what Jesus said.

Questions for conversation:

1. Discuss the impact that gospel writers have made because of their journaling of Jesus' life and ministry. How would we understand the Good News were it not for men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to write what they witnessed?
2. What are some pros and cons about reading others' eyewitness written recording of events?

In **verse 3 and 4**, we read how and why Dr. Luke wrote the Gospel that bears his name. First, he stated that he "carefully investigated everything from the beginning." Scholars believe that Luke had not met Jesus personally and was not an eyewitness to the things that Jesus said or did. However, Luke shared in this Gospel that he thoroughly investigated everything, which would have included interviewing many eyewitnesses to put together a complete historical and gospel narrative of the life and ministry of Jesus. The Gospel of Luke starts from the beginning, even before Jesus' birth, as Luke starts his book with Zechariah's story and Mary visiting Elizabeth. Jesus' birth doesn't happen until the 2nd chapter of his Gospel. Luke also includes Jesus' story as a 12-yr.-old speaking with religious leaders. He carefully researched everything from even before Jesus was born to his childhood to his life as a teacher, preacher, and our Savior.

Luke also mentioned that "he decided to write an orderly account." Luke described Jesus' life after thorough collection of accounts, evaluation, organization and putting the pieces together in an orderly fashion.

Finally, he mentions the purpose of his writing, "so that you may know the certainty of the things that have been taught." Luke addressed this orderly account to "most excellent Theophilus", who some believe was a wealthy donor and convert who paid for Luke's literary work. The term "most excellent" was used to refer to high-ranking noblemen, and thus, Theophilus may have been such. In addition, other scholars believe that, since the name means "friend of God", could have been written to any Christian reader.

Questions for conversation:

1. Knowing that Luke wrote his Gospel after careful investigation from the beginning and writing an orderly account, what are your thoughts about this Book of the Bible and the accuracy, effectiveness, and power of its message?
2. Luke was a highly educated and gifted writer. However, God does not expect us to be as gifted as this author when it comes to the spiritual discipline of journaling. We simply need to be open to the Holy Spirit in sharing our thoughts, prayers, and writings. Discuss this.

Read Acts 1:1-2

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

The writer of the Book of Acts is none other than Dr. Luke himself. When Luke refers to his “former book”, he is talking about the Gospel of Luke. Notice the person that Luke addresses in the verse above. We see here that Luke is writing to the same person, Theophilus, as a continuation of his former book.

As a fellow worker with the apostle Paul, Luke now shifts the attention from Jesus in the Gospel of Luke to the effects of Jesus’ ministry in the Book of Acts. We see Luke giving another orderly account of the early church and the works of the Holy Spirit as the gospel continued to be spread not just to Jews but to Gentiles as well. The Book of Acts continued with the narrative that Luke began, and furthermore included narrative accounts of what Luke and other apostles experienced firsthand as the Gospel spread throughout all the world!

Questions for conversation:

1. Discuss some significant events and stories that stand out to you in Luke’s recordings of the early church and the ministries of Peter and Paul in the Book of Acts.
2. Discuss how Luke left a legacy for others because of his journaling, recording, and remembering God’s ways and works.

As we’ve studied both passages, we learned that Luke may not have been an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus, but he carefully investigated the things that were fulfilled, and he decided to write an orderly account. Why? He decided to write because he wanted Theophilus to know the certainty of the things he was taught. Through the investigating, collecting, analyzing, organizing, journaling of Luke, we too can know the certainty of the things that we have been taught.

Challenge and application:

1. Read the Books of Luke and Acts in their entirety to understand the Gospel fully and to reflect on the beginnings of the early church.
2. In her book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun includes some things that we can do to practice journaling:
 - a. Keep a written record of God’s ways in your life; journals can include a collection of clippings, drawings, collages, articles, poems, quotes and so forth.
 - b. Journal daily or weekly or during significant events and transitions.
 - c. Making journals and scrapbooks for children or others (like Major Millie is doing in retirement for her grandchildren).
 - d. Record prayers, prayer requests, answers to prayers and responses to God in all of this.

Happy journaling!