

Session 6



Extending Grace

THE POINT

We should be conduits of God's grace to others.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My 32-year-old niece Andria is a huge country music fan. She's been to countless CMA concerts and knows the words to every hit song. We recently received a picture of her hugging country music star Lainey Wilson. We were thrilled she had the opportunity to meet Lainey, but it was nothing new. Andria has been hugged by and photographed with many country music artists. Numerous times she's been invited up on stage with a country music star during the concert. Is Andria an accomplished singer or musician? No, Andria has Down's Syndrome. Andria's condition can make some people uncomfortable, so they keep their distance. Andria isn't a PR photo op; they genuinely care about Andria and look for her at their concerts. This is grace.

In this session, Jesus demonstrates His care and concern for those who are different, the social outcast, those deemed unacceptable or inferior. His willingness to extend grace to them should compel believers to do the same.

QUESTION 1:

What celebrity do you appreciate for the way they lift up others?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

LUKE 19:1-4

He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² There was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was not able because of the crowd, since he was a short man. ⁴ So running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus, since he was about to pass that way.

Prior to Luke 19, we see Jesus healing a blind man while on His way to Jericho. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus sometimes told people not to speak of His miracles—but not now. It was time for Jesus to reveal His divine identity and mission. His interaction with Zacchaeus demonstrates both His divine identity and mission.

Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and he was rich. The term “chief” likely means he gave oversight to other tax collectors who worked for him and took a cut of their collections. Tax collectors were allowed to assess some taxes at their discretion. This could not only make a tax collector rich but give them the reputation of being dishonest and a thief.

However, Zacchaeus's reputation suffered even more because he was a Jew. The Jewish population deeply resented the rule of Rome in Israel. Tax collectors basically worked for the Roman government, which meant a Jewish tax collector was colluding with the enemy. No doubt Zacchaeus was viewed as a traitor, betraying the Jewish people and their culture.

But it gets worse. Zacchaeus's continual contact with Gentiles made him ceremonially unclean. Because of the strict nature of the

clean/unclean laws in Judaism, this caused Zacchaeus to be treated as an outcast. This was the pain Zacchaeus carried with him daily, but that was about to change.

Zacchaeus heard Jesus was in town and Zacchaeus wanted to see him. There was just one problem: Zacchaeus was a short man. His stature and the size of the crowd would keep him from seeing Jesus, but this did not deter Zacchaeus. He calculated Jesus's potential path and then climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Him pass.

We're not told why Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. Was he simply hoping to see a miracle? Was it just an opportunity to see this new rabbi everyone was talking about? Or did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus in the hope that Jesus would see him? His motivation is unclear, but his actions tell us this: his desire to see Jesus was so strong that he was willing to climb a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Him.

Throughout these verses we see Zacchaeus acting on his own. It might be considered a weak argument, but there's no record of anyone helping Zacchaeus to see Jesus. No one took the time to consider Zacchaeus's limitations or

inability to get close to Jesus. No one showed any sensitivity to Zacchaeus's plight. Of course, believers today have a responsibility to help those who are seeking Jesus.

- **As followers of Jesus, He leads us to love others.** The second part of the Great Commandment is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Our love for others will motivate us to share the gospel with others.
- **Believers know better than anyone the benefits of being in a right relationship with God.** We remember what it was like to be enslaved to sin. Now, our new life in Christ is filled with His peace and His presence. We have a hope that transcends every circumstance. This should compel us to help others know Jesus and His salvation.

- **In today's world, a person seeking God without assistance can end up on the wrong path.** False teaching abounds and can lead people astray. Believers know the truth that salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone. Those seeking Jesus need to hear that truth.

Every day we're surrounded by people who are seeking Jesus, yet may not even realize it. Jesus wants us to be sensitive toward those He has placed in our path so we can help them see their need for Jesus and turn to Him in faith.

QUESTION 2:

What are some obstacles that get in the way of people finding Jesus?

LUKE 19:5-6

⁵ When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house." ⁶ So he quickly came down and welcomed him joyfully.

Throughout the four Gospels, the writers record phrases like in verse 1, "He entered Jericho and was passing through." Jesus traveled not just to places but to people—like Zacchaeus.

I love the contrast presented in these two verses. Jesus was undoubtedly surrounded by a large crowd of people, many who had most likely witnessed the miraculous healing of the blind man just outside of Jericho. I won't call them "groupies," but these people were showing obvious support for Jesus. They liked Jesus and wanted to be near Him. Any one of

them would have been an appropriate choice for Jesus to spend the day at their home. But Jesus's arrival in Jericho wasn't for the purpose of simply spending time with His supporters. He was there to connect with someone who was far from God.

And so, when Jesus saw Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree, He said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house" (v. 5). When Zacchaeus heard this, "he quickly came down and welcomed [Jesus] joyfully" (v. 6). This passage is

a vivid picture of God's grace. Let's take note of some of the specific aspects of God's grace.

- **Grace shows God's commitment to sinners.**

Jesus knew Zacchaeus; He called him by name and there's no mention of a previous relationship. Since Jesus omnisciently knew Zacchaeus, He also knew he was a tax collector, a sinner, and someone who had lived his life apart from God. Yet, it was this man Jesus chose to spend the day with. In His grace, Jesus demonstrates His commitment to sinners and seeks fellowship with us.

- **Grace accepts sinners.** Grace will risk being uncomfortable with sinful behavior in order to have the opportunity to invite others to receive God's gift of salvation. As someone has rightly said, "Lost people act like lost people." Grace accepts that they are sinners but then points to the new life they can receive through Jesus Christ.

- **Grace is necessary.** Can you imagine how Zacchaeus must have felt when he heard Jesus say, "hurry and come down because today it is necessary for me to stay at your house" (v. 5)? Those words not only told Zacchaeus Jesus wanted to spend time with him on a personal level, but also that there was a sense of urgency and purpose

for His visit. For someone reviled and spit on by his own people, those words had to be a balm for his soul. However, it wasn't out of compassion alone that Jesus stated the necessity of His visit. Zacchaeus was a sinner who needed saving, and only grace could accomplish that.

- **Grace is powerful.** Grace is often defined as "God's unmerited favor" or "receiving something good that we don't deserve." Jesus demonstrated grace to Zacchaeus when He said, "it is necessary for me to stay at your house." This meant sharing a meal together. In Judaism, sharing a meal was an intimate act of fellowship. By sharing this meal together, Jesus was inviting Zacchaeus into intimate fellowship with Him, something Zacchaeus knew he didn't deserve. As we will see, it clearly had a powerful impact on Zacchaeus.

QUESTION 3:

What do you find encouraging about Jesus's response to Zacchaeus?

LUKE 19:7-10

⁷ All who saw it began to complain, "He's gone to stay with a sinful man." ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much." ⁹ "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham." ¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

Engage

PROJECTING GRACE

“Projecting force” is a military term describing ways to extend the reach of a nation’s power. Christians should “Project Grace”—extending God’s grace to other people, especially to persons different from ourselves.

Underline one of these identifiers that challenges your sharing Christ’s grace with someone:

Racial differences

Social barriers

Known sin

Financial inequities

Ethnic background

Share how Jesus’s interaction with Zacchaeus helps you overcome the above challenge:

Identify how being a recipient of God’s grace might motivate you to share His grace with others, regardless of their personal situations:

Jesus wasn't swayed by the crowd's opinion. Luke explained, "All who saw it began to complain, 'He's gone to stay with a sinful man'" (v. 7). In one sense, the crowd was right. Zacchaeus was a sinful man. They based their view on his vocation as a tax collector, yet they unknowingly stated the truth of Romans 3:23 that says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Zacchaeus was, in fact, a sinful man.

But they were wrong in a big way about Jesus's decision to spend the day with Zacchaeus. In the same way that a Pharisee had previously condemned the woman who anointed Jesus's feet with perfume and washed His feet with her tears, they too had written Zacchaeus off as hopeless, beyond the reach of God's grace. Aren't you glad they were wrong? Whenever a person is truly transformed by the grace of God as expressed through salvation, things change. In fact, things must change. We no longer pursue sin and its empty promises; we pursue Christ and His will and ways. And those changes will show up in what we say and what we do. It did for Zacchaeus.

In response to receiving God's grace, Zacchaeus said, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much." (v. 8). Because of this transformation that had put him in a right relationship with God, Zacchaeus declared he was going to be a new man, and he would prove it by doing two things. First, he would demonstrate generosity to the poor. During his day, it was considered generous to give twenty percent of your belongings to the poor, but Zacchaeus was determined to exceed that. Second, he would repay those from whom he had extorted money or possessions, but again, Zacchaeus was determined to

go above expectations. The law demanded the return of the money or property plus one fifth of the value. To restore four times as much reflects the gratitude Zacchaeus felt for God's grace toward himself.

Notice how Jesus responded to all this. He affirmed Zacchaeus's repentance and proclaimed that "Today salvation has come to this house" (v. 9). Jesus's acceptance of Zacchaeus was not rooted in who he had been but who he had become—a son of Abraham, which means a recipient of God's righteousness.

The story of Zacchaeus illustrates this truth: when we are transformed by God's grace, we treat others with grace. God wants you and me to be conduits of His grace to others. That grace will show in our willingness to build relationships with lost people, in our patience with their sinful behavior, and in our words of truth spoken in love so they may be saved.

QUESTION 4:

When have you seen someone respond with grace because of the grace they have been shown?

QUESTION 5:

How can our group be a place that shows grace to others?

LIVE IT OUT

Choose an activity below that will help you become a conduit of God's grace.

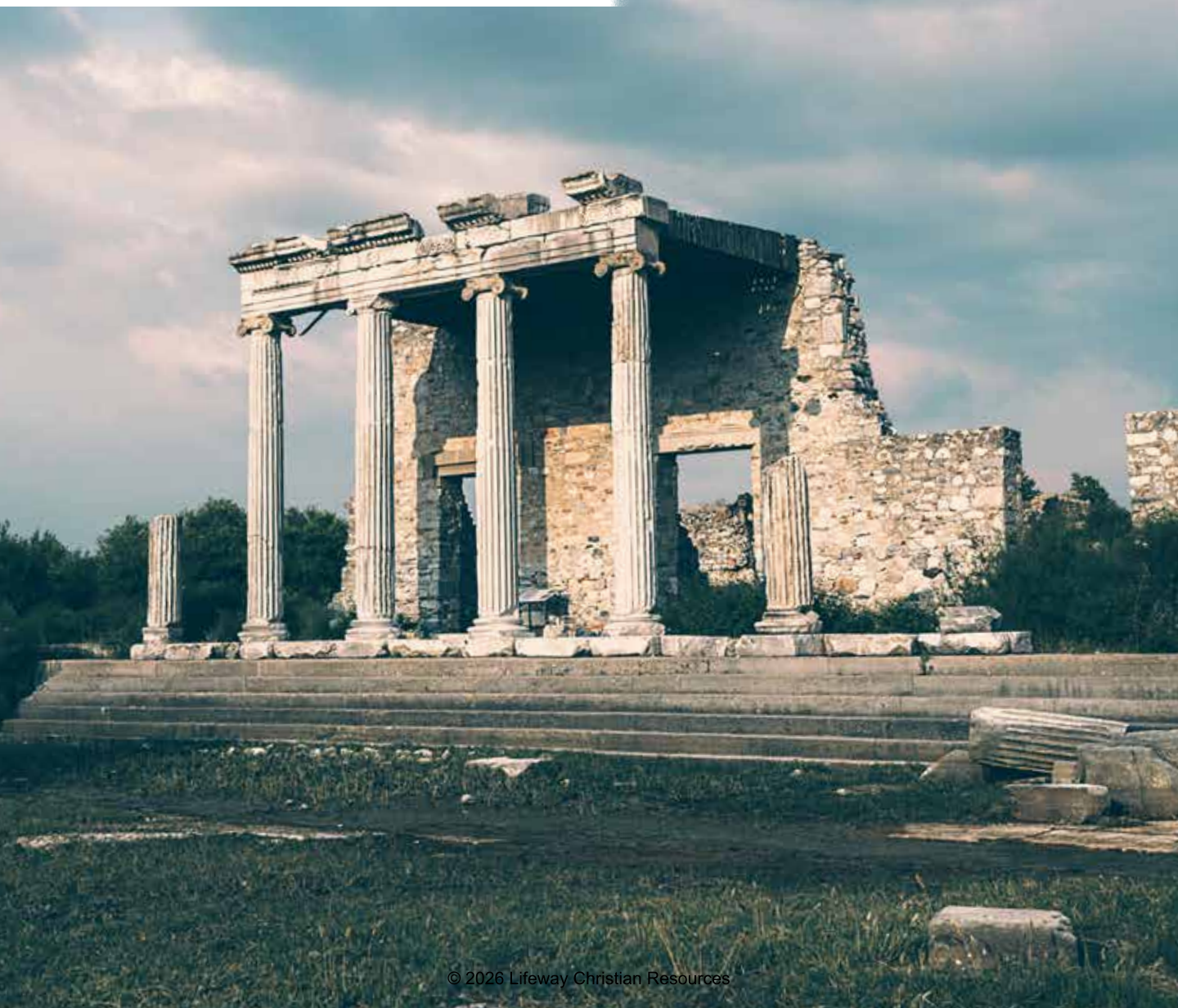
- **Confess.** Avoiding sin is good, but we mustn't isolate ourselves from unbelievers. We must guard against the view that some people are beyond God's grace. If there are people you view that way, pray and ask God to forgive you.
- **Connect.** Do you have any friends who are unbelievers? Make the effort to build a new relationship with a person far from God. Be ready to be God's conduit for His grace.
- **Commit.** Speak with your pastor or someone on church staff about possible mission opportunities. The North American Mission Board (NAMB) has short-term opportunities that can put you in touch with people far from God. Commit to an opportunity that will allow you to share God's grace with others.



LUKE: ALL WE KNOW

by Terry Ellis

Ruins of the ancient city of Miletus, which was founded by the Iconian Greeks in the 10th century B.C. On Paul's third missionary journey, he traveled from the Island of Samos and landed at Miletus (Acts 20:15).



THE THIRD AND FIFTH BOOKS of the New Testament comprise approximately 20 percent of that section of our Bible and are almost certainly authored by the same person. The fact that the writer addressed both books to a man named Theophilus is the first of many pieces of evidence of common authorship. Who was the author? Most people are somewhat surprised to realize that neither the Gospel nor the first history of the church have a named author within the text. In other words, nowhere in either book do we find a claim as to who wrote either book. We have no preface, no back cover flap, no sidebar describing the author and listing his accomplishments. Amazingly, in neither Luke or Acts does the name Luke actually appear. The traditions linking the man Luke to both Luke and Acts are ancient and reliable. The task in this article is not to defend his authorship of these two documents. Rather, we are going to assume that Luke indeed wrote both and seek to answer a different question. Who, in fact, was Luke?

WHO WAS LUKE?

The evidence is fairly sparse but nevertheless significant. The source of information about him is the Bible itself. Three passages mention Luke. Each one supplies important information about the man responsible for more of the New Testament than any other person except for Paul. The two works for which he was responsible also provide clues to the kind of man Luke was. From this evidence we can deduce the following characteristics of Luke.

A PHYSICIAN

In Colossians 4:14, Paul referred warmly to Luke as “the beloved physician” (NASB). This designation is self-evident and has led to some interesting research over the years. In the late 19th century, W. K. Hobart published *The Medical Language of St. Luke*.¹ In it, he analyzed words and phrases he

believed indicated Luke’s medical background. Though quite interesting and persuasive for a number of years, Hobart’s work was eventually discounted by H. J. Cadbury² who demonstrated that Luke’s medical vocabulary was common to any educated writer of the day. Indeed the so-called “medical vocabulary” of Luke is in all the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark. We see nothing truly distinctive about Luke’s vocabulary that would indicate he was a physician. The unique vocabulary does not mean, however, that Luke was not a physician; it simply means we cannot rely solely on a unique vocabulary to prove this contention.

Paul’s description is sufficient evidence. As a physician, Luke would have been trained at one of the three great schools in the empire of that day: Tarsus, Alexandria, and Athens.³ Luke seemed to have had a special knowledge and affinity for Antioch in Syria,⁴ which would support the assumption that he was trained at Tarsus—of the three cities with medical schools, Tarsus was the closest to Syrian Antioch. This, however, is by no means certain.

We can reasonably conclude that, as a physician, Luke was well educated and capable. Paul’s added description of “beloved” indicates that Luke was indeed a valued ministry partner in Paul’s early mission endeavors.

A COMPANION TO PAUL

In Colossians 4:14, Paul, writing from prison, indicated that Luke was with him and sent his greetings to the Colossian Christians. Therefore, the Colossians must have known Luke, most probably because he accompanied Paul on his journeys through that region. Was Luke in prison with Paul? The evidence does not point to this, but Luke apparently was with Paul as much as he could be under the circumstances. Philemon 24 contains another reference to Luke. During the same imprisonment during which Paul wrote the

Colossians, he also wrote Philemon. Luke, along with several others, was with Paul.

The same scenario is likely in another passage. Second Timothy contains some of the closing reflections from Paul's life. He was near death and knew it. In 4:11 he wrote, "Only Luke is with me." The words betray a comfort that comes from long association. Luke was with him at the end.

Finally, the Book of Acts contains several very interesting sections that are referred to as the "we sections" (16:10-17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16). Written in the first person plural, these passages obviously reflect the fact that the author was with Paul on some of his missionary journeys. The first person pronouns and the unusual degree of detail indicate that the author was not merely recounting stories he had heard, but relating journeys in which he had participated. The fact that the author was with Paul during a time when he was imprisoned combined with the fact that Luke is named in some of these "prison epistles" both support the tradition that Luke was, in fact, the author of the Third Gospel and the Book of Acts.

A GENTILE

The supposition that Luke was a Gentile is one of the most intriguing aspects of his identity. Of this, we cannot be certain, but we do find several clues to support this possibility. First, in Colossians 4, Paul noted those who were with him as he wrote. In verses 10-11, he listed Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus as companions and the only men of the circumcision among his fellow workers. In other words, these three companions were Jewish.

Paul next referenced Epaphras, whom he described as "one of you" (v. 12, HCSB), meaning that Epaphras was a Gentile like the Colossians. Paul next listed Luke. That Luke shared the same racial background as Epaphras is likely. As Paul did not list Luke with the others of the circumcision, he was most probably a Gentile.

Again, by no means is this certain, and some scholars have doubted it. When we go to Luke/Acts, however, the grammar, vocabulary, and style all seem to reflect a Gentile's point of view. For example, the manner in which Luke began his Gospel, writing to Theophilus who apparently was a Roman government official, seems to indicate that Luke shared his recipient's non-Jewish background. Luke avoided almost all of the Semitic phrases common in the other Gospels. Nor did he reference many of the disputes about Jewish laws recorded elsewhere. Finally, the Greek language found in Luke/Acts is some of the finest in the New Testament, rivaling that in Hebrews.⁵ While this does not rule out a well-educated Jew, it does seem to support the view that Luke was a Gentile.

That 20 percent of the New Testament was written by a Gentile betrays a certain divine symmetry. The Christian faith grew from rich Jewish soil. The earliest debates about the nature of Christianity concerned the place of Gentiles and the opportunity they had to participate in the kingdom.

Paul's mission became Gentile-oriented, and for that we should all be grateful. How fitting and appropriate that God would select Luke as one of the companions in Paul's mission to the Gentiles—Luke, who authored a great deal of the book that would guide the faith forever.

The three texts that directly mention Luke are only a small part of "all we know." The Gospel and history he authored bear a literary fingerprint that points to a person of great intellect, refined writing skills, and, above all, a deep faith.

Luke's Gospel is unique in several ways. He was a careful researcher, examining with a scholar's skill the other narratives concerning Jesus's life and ministry, interviewing eyewitnesses, and writing an "orderly account" of the truth (Luke 1:1-4, NIV). He was very concerned to show that Jesus was for all people of all races. He traced the lineage of Jesus back to Adam, the father of us all (3:38),



as opposed to Abraham, who was specifically the father of the Jews (as in Matthew). Luke also emphasized in his Gospel the centrality of prayer, including details unique to his Gospel concerning prayers at significant points in Jesus's ministry and parables underscoring the importance of prayer. Women and the poor likewise received special attention from his quill, as he highlighted Jesus's deep concern for the overlooked and underprivileged in that day's society. Luke obviously loved the stories he heard from the eyewitnesses to Jesus's ministry and included in great detail long stories about a wandering son drawn home by a father's love (15:11-24) and of two men on a road to Emmaus who discovered the true meaning of Easter (24:13-35).

Any solid introduction to the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts will delineate in great detail the above characteristics of this two-volume work. Suffice it here to say that Luke's legacy to us betrays a man who was careful in his work, but never allowed scholarship to cool the fires of faith. Luke was first and foremost a healer. He began his career with a passion for making people whole,

Roman forum at Philippi. Luke accompanied Paul to Philippi, where Lydia and others became believers (Acts 16:11-40).

to relieve suffering and guide people to a better physical life. By God's gentle hand he was guided into a career that enabled him to be a healer of the soul. His words are inspired and all who read them are brought face to face with the true Healer. Like any good author, Luke recedes into the background and allows the subject to carry the story. But in his work, Luke left enough clues to convince any careful reader that the author was a man who uniquely combined a clear intellect with a warm and winsome faith.

Terry Ellis is pastor at Spring Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama.

1. W. K. Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Co., 1882).

2. H. J. Cadbury, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, eds. E. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (London: Macmillan, 1942), II, 349-55.

3. E. P. Blair, "Luke (Evangelist)" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 179.

4. Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, in *Anchor Bible*, eds. William Albright and David Freedman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 42.

5. Malcolm Tolbert, "Luke" vol. 9 in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 2.