

# LUKE—WEEK 4

## CHALLENGES



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The Preaching of the Baptist by Domenico Ghirlandaio  
(1449–1494) a fresco on display at Santa Maria Novella, Florence*

Jesus and John surprise folks.

They consistently say and do things that people don't expect.

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Thank you.

Luke 2:41–3:38 — Challenges  
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1 Luke 2:41–52 (ESV)

*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.*

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*

This story sounds like the movie “*Home Alone*.” However, there’s one crucial difference; in “*Home Alone*” the mother doesn’t blame Kevin for getting left behind. But Mary, in her panic, tries to blame her 12-year-old son for having been forgotten when the caravan left for Nazareth.

Mary says, “*Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.*” Jesus’ reply is simple and to the point. “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*”

Jesus is telling them that they shouldn’t have ever been worried; He was where he should be. The question, “*Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*” would normally be rhetorical. That is, we would expect it to mean, “You knew where I’d be, right?” But maybe it’s a straight question. Maybe Jesus really is just asking if they knew that He had to be in His father’s house.

If so, the answer is, “No.” They didn’t know that He had to be in His Father’s house. They don’t get it afterwards either. *And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.*

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Parenting is tough, and this is a stark portrait of how tough it can get. Mary is, as Gabriel said, “favored.” Yet despite her incredible blessings, her life is no cakewalk. Here, she’s struggling. No surprise there; every parent struggles. So does every Christian. Life is full of trials, more so for parents and Christians. Anyone who enters parenthood or Christianity expecting things to go smoothly is misinformed.

People generally know that about parenting, but Christianity is often sold as just an easy ticket to heaven. That couldn’t be further from the truth. Christianity is actually what we see in the books of Luke and Acts. It’s full of surprises, trials, and God’s supernatural provision.

Gabriel was right; Mary is favored. Favored doesn’t mean comfortable.

2 Luke 3:1–6 (ESV)

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,*

*“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”*

Even though only Isaiah 40:3–5 is quoted here, the whole chapter is invoked. It begins with:

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. — Isaiah 40:1–2*

It ends with—*Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. — Isaiah 40:30–31*

Isaiah 40 was written to Israel in exile, and it foretells their return. But there’s something more here, something glorious. Isaiah 40 just oozes anticipation of a personal visit from God.

Passages like these in Isaiah 40 are why Israel was so keen on the coming messiah. Read it all to capture the feeling.

John is heralding something everyone has been anxiously waiting for.

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Have you ever waited a long time for a prayer to be answered? Are you still waiting for one? God’s timing can be frustrating. That’s because we’re impatient.

Patience is an advanced skill well worth learning. If you have a long-standing prayer request, revisit it and spend some serious time praying about it and seeking the Lord’s will. Pray long enough that your mind (and the subject) wanders a bit. We ask for the wrong thing more often than we realize. Longer prayers often reveal this—as the Holy Spirit takes over.

This is a lot harder than it sounds—for a curious reason. Our sinful nature often objects to the redirection. If you start praying for, say, someone’s illness, and your prayer gets redirected, it can feel wrong—like you aren’t doing what you committed to doing. Don’t let that bother you; there’s no time constraint.

If you can stick with the prayer, you can learn great things—even patience.

3 Luke 3:7–14 (ESV)

*He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

*And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”*

John’s insulting words seem designed to drive the crowds away—yet they have the opposite effect. Why would people flock to hear a message like this? Why would they ask such a man to instruct them in how to live?

Truth can have this effect. There’s something deep inside everyone that loves truth. It’s the image of God in us. That “voice of the conscience” can be suppressed, but is never totally silenced. When the lies of this world don’t work as promised, we start to realize that the voice may have been right all along.

When the conditions are right, bold truth can really catch on. Israel was anticipating the arrival of the messiah, and John’s harsh language fits the narrative.

His words of truth spread like wildfire.

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Christians should be comfortable in public with the gospel, but we’re often cowed into hiding our beliefs. The forces of evil want us to be intimidated. Christians are typically painted as hypocrites (or worse) in the media. We need to counter that by making our faith an obvious part of our personalities.

We don’t need to be like someone preaching from a soap-box on street-corners—just comfortable talking about what we love. Instead, we act like our faith is something weird—at least very private.

Loving Jesus isn’t any stranger than loving chess or loving bluegrass music. Knowing what the Bible says isn’t any stranger than knowing what Shakespeare wrote.

Ask God to give you peace and comfort in your faith. It’s neither something to hide nor something to be confrontational about.

Knowing who Jesus is and what He did is like knowing the warning signs of a stroke.

It’s something everyone should know.

4 Luke 3:15–22 (ESV)

*As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*

*So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.*

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*

Notice how John avoids using the word “Christ.” The people ask him, “*whether he might be the Christ,*” and he answers with a glorious description of the one who “*is coming.*” The one who is coming is so mighty that John isn’t even worthy to untie His sandals.

The one who is coming will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The one who is coming will separate the wheat from the chaff. This is a frightening picture of final judgment.

Avoiding the word "Christ" makes perfect sense. The people had a preconceived notion that the coming Christ would be a conquering hero. John is making sure he doesn’t play into that stereotype.

His shocking words are meant to shock. He’s elevating the coming Messiah to something greater than the Messiah they’re expecting. This sets the stage for the last paragraph above, where God really takes it up.

He announces to all present that Jesus is His incarnate son.

The first century Israelis knew what kind of Messiah was “supposed to” show up. “We’ll show those Romans what real power looks like!” The only problem is they believed in the Messiah they want instead of the Messiah God sent.

We make a similar mistake. We don’t want a conquering king; we want a benevolent savior.

But that forgets the word Lord—or at least forgets what it means.

So, we don’t treat Him like a boss, much less the Lord. We don’t pray to Him like He’s our Lord. We don’t serve Him like He’s our Lord. We don’t think of Him as our Lord. He’s just our Savior.

How convenient.

5 Luke 3:23–38 (ESV)

*Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.*

This genealogy doesn't agree with the one at the beginning of Matthew. In that account, Joseph's father isn't Heli; it's Jacob.

*and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, — Matthew 1:16a*

Joseph can only have one biological father, so the other must be his adoptive father. Joseph's biological father may have died or divorced his mother.

Christians don't usually show much interest in these genealogies other than to resolve the differences between the two accounts. It may seem strange that the genealogy of Joseph's adoptive father would be relevant. But don't forget that both genealogies are of Jesus' adoptive father, so it must be important for some reason. It is important because it makes Jesus of the house of David, confirming Samuel's prophesy.

*“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.” — 2 Samuel 7:16a*

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Genealogy is back. Lots of people enjoy tracing their ancestry using one of the online services. It's fun, but no one takes it as seriously as they did back in Biblical times. But we all have a second genealogy—how we became Christians. By this, I don't mean knowing who led you to Christ and who led them to Christ, etc. I mean how you made the decision.

The answer to that is always the Holy Spirit. Revisit what happened and what you were thinking when you committed your life to Christ. Notes would be helpful here. You signed a contract (or entered a covenant—same thing) and you should be clear about what that was.

Whether it's your confession of Christ or your marriage vows, if you can't remember what you promised or why you promised it, you've lost something precious.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Ever been in a panicked “lost” situation, either you or your child?
2. Have you found longer prayers more fruitful? How?
3. When sharing the gospel, what are the things it’s important to **not** do?
4. Why was incarnation such a big surprise to the Israelites?
5. How did you become a Christian? What was the last thing stopping you before you finally made the commitment?