THAT YOU MAY BE CERTAIN

STUDY OF THE BOOK OF LUKE

Devotional Guide

For the Church

By the Church

“Disciple” is a biblical word that has, in the last decade or so, become more of a Church culture catchphrase. In church, we hear the words “disciple” and “discipleship” and, many times, have a hard time nailing down a definition of what they truly mean. Unfortunately, for many in the Church, discipleship happens in a classroom setting where the Bible is taught by “professional” Christians who are trained and well-qualified.

Discipleship is simply this—followers of Jesus leading other followers of Jesus to follow Jesus.

This book of devotional readings comes from a pastors heart to see the Church disciple the Church. These readings are written by ordinary everyday followers of Jesus inviting us into their walk with him.

Our prayer is that the Word of Christ would dwell richly in you and that Christ would be formed in you.

Dr. Daniel Atkins
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November 23

Luke 1:1-25

Written for the Church by Dr. Daniel Atkins

For the first six years of my life, I was an only child. I wanted, more than anything in the world, to have a baby sister. I prayed every single night that God would give me a sister that I could be a big brother to. What I didn't know is that my parents wanted to have a baby, too. And, for years, they also prayed. I will never forget the day when my mom, in tears, came into my bedroom to tell me the good news– she was pregnant. We immediately drove to my dad's office and I barged in yelling, "WE'RE HAVING A BABY!!!"

In Luke 1:1-25, we meet a couple who, for many years, wanted a baby. One day, while serving in the temple, Zechariah was surprised by a visit from the angel Gabriel bringing good news that God was going to bless he and his wife, Elizabeth, with a baby. This baby would grow up and serve God's special purpose–proclaiming the arrival of God's Son. God's miracle in Zechariah and Elizabeth's life was so improbable, though, that Zechariah just couldn't believe it. God's messenger had brought His word to Zechariah but Zechariah had a crisis of faith. As a result, the angel took away Zechariah's ability to speak.

God's Word—His promises—always come to pass. The question is—will we believe by faith or will we doubt? If we doubt, we might miss out on the blessing of what God wants to do!

Zechariah and Elizabeth were chosen by God to play a special role in His plan to bring salvation to the world through Jesus. Zechariah couldn't understand how God could use them. All he saw were the obstacles—their age, their inability—God gave the promise. We, too, are called to be part of God's plan to bring salvation to the world. Are we making excuses or are we saying, "Lord, I am weak, you are strong. I am inadequate but you are powerful"?

November 24

Luke 1:26-38

Written for the Church by Dr. Daniel Atkins

Have you ever been given a responsibility that you felt insufficient and unworthy of? I feel that every single day as a Pastor, as a dad, and as a husband. I often ask myself, "Why me, Lord? You know how sinful I am. You know how spiritually inconsistent I am. Surely, you could have chosen someone else!"

That has to be how Mary felt when Gabriel gave her the news that God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus. Remember, she was most likely a teenager. She was from a small town. She wasn't even married! I'm sure Mary was tempted to think, "God, why me?!?! Surely you could have chosen a way more qualified person!"

But, that's not how God's grace works. God's grace doesn't choose the worthy. It doesn't necessarily call the most "qualified" (as the world understands "qualified").

Notice how Gabriel greets her in verse 28—"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" What does it mean for Mary to be a "favored one?" That phrase literally means "full of grace," or, "a recipient of divine grace." Luke tells us that Mary was "greatly troubled" by this. She's confused and confounded.

Here's the first truth I want you to understand—God's grace chooses us. God's grace isn't earned or deserved. It's not based on our merit. God's grace doesn't do a background check on us. God lavishes His undeserved and unmerited grace on us—knowing full well who we are. He chooses to love us and save us because of His grace and by His grace alone.

Gabriel tells Mary not to be afraid and then proceeds to explain to her who this baby will be—He is the Son of God, the promised descendent of David who will rule and reign, and he is the Savior of the world. Obviously, no one would feel worthy of this great responsibility. Any of us would be fearful and unworthy of this calling. But, the second great truth is—God's grace makes us worthy. The reality is, in and of herself, Mary was not worthy. But, God's grace takes the unworthy and makes them worthy.

Finally, Mary asks a very natural question, "How can this be?" She was a virgin. She wasn't married yet. How would God do this? Many of us ask the same question. "How could God use me? I'm not trained. I'm not qualified. I don't know enough about the Bible!" Here's the third truth—God's grace empowers us. I love what Gabriel tells Mary—"nothing is impossible with God."

In the end, Mary fully surrenders to the grace and the power of God. She surrenders her life as a servant to God to be used by Him...not because of her worthiness or her ability or her status...but because of His grace. Will you surrender to be used by Him today?

November 25

Luke 1:39-56

Written for the Church by Dr. Daniel Atkins

I grew up in a musical family. Someone was always playing the guitar, the piano, singing, humming, whistling–you name it and we were finding a way to produce our favorite songs. I think that's part of why I love the book of Psalms. It's a book of songs–or, if you like–a hymn book. The Psalms are songs of the soul as an expression of our relationship with God.

Here, in verses 39-56, we hear Mary sing a song. But, this song isn't one she had learned from her parents. It wasn't one that she had heard anywhere else. It was a song–a new song–from her soul. In fact, Psalm 96:1 and Psalm 98:1 command us to "sing unto the Lord a new song" to tell of His glory and His salvation. And, that's exactly what Mary is doing, here.

We sing songs on Sunday mornings in our worship service for four reasons: 1) To teach our souls truth about God. Look back through these verses. What truths does Mary declare about God?; 2) To give glory to God. As you read these verses, in what ways does Mary give glory to God and how does she do this?; 3) We confront falsehood in our own hearts. You see, there is a battle waging for our

hearts. We come into worship each week fighting the battle of idolatry—the world, the devil, and the flesh trying to redirect our worship from the One who is worthy to the false gods of this world. How do you see Mary confronting idolatry and falsehood?[1]

[1] These three points are taken from "Why We Worship" by Adriel Sanchez.

November 26

Luke 1:57-66

Written for the Church by Dr. Daniel Atkins

I'll admit that I'm a little partial to the name "John." It was my great-grandfather's first name, my grandfather's first name, my father's first name, it's my first name, and it's my son's first name. I've told him several times that when he gets married and has a son, one day, there's no pressure, but he better not mess up the streak!

Several years ago, my grandfather, father, and I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to travel–just the three of us –to Romania on a mission trip. Very quickly, the Romanians dubbed us First John, Second John, and Third John. I'll let you guess which one of us was which.

For Zechariah and Elizabeth, there was no doubt whatsoever as to the name they would give their child. Remember, back in verse 13, Gabriel had instructed Zechariah to name him "John." John is a special name. It means, "YHWH (God) is gracious." He gives us what we don't deserve.

Now, here's the interesting thing in this passage. No one understood why Zechariah and Elizabeth would name their son "John." They say, "No one in your family is named

John. That doesn't make any sense!" Well, it may not have made sense to anyone and it may have been silly to everyone else but that didn't matter to Zechariah and Elizabeth. They were more focused on obedience to God. They knew that the only appropriate response to God's grace—His undeserved kindness—is obedience.

If you're saved, God has been so gracious and kind to you in so many ways. Are you responding each day, in every moment, and in every area of your life, in obedience to Him—even if the world looks at you and can't understand? Even if your friends ridicule you?

November 27

Luke 1:67-80

Written for the Church by Dr. Daniel Atkins

I absolutely love imagining how this scene played out. Zechariah, unable to speak for nine months, finally has his mouth opened! All of the joy and excitement that had been pent up inside him—that he couldn't express—finally came bursting forth as he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Zechariah's joy turned to prophecy. Filled with the Spirit, he spoke words of hope and promise over his newborn son. As I read Luke 1:67-80, my heart, as a father, is drawn to Zechariah's heart and words he speaks over his son. It makes me think about the words that I am speaking over my own children and the prayers that I pray over them. Honestly, as a dad, it convicts me to the core. I don't pray over my children like I should. I don't speak words of love and encouragement and gospel affirmation over them like I should.

My parents are the most praying people I know. I can remember, as a child, my parents praying over me and my sisters. I remember, as a teenager, coming downstairs early in the morning to leave for school, and hearing my mom in her "prayer chair" interceding for us. I remember, as a

college student, my dad laying his hands on my head and praying that God would "pour out a double-portion of His blessing" on me and that God would use me in more powerful ways that He had used even my dad. Those things have been burned into my memories for over 35 years.

Parents, how are you praying over your children? What words are you speaking over them? God is listening...and so are they.