

JESUS IN HIGH-RESOLUTION

A Lenten Small Group Study

ABOUT THE STUDY

Lent is a season of holy attention. It is a time when the church slows its pace, sharpens its focus, and allows God to examine not only what we do, but how we see, as we journey toward the cross and the hope of resurrection in Jesus Christ.

Jesus in High-Resolution is a Lenten small group study designed to accompany the preaching series of the same name. Together, the sermons and small group conversations invite participants to encounter Jesus with greater clarity, honesty, and depth by moving from well-known texts toward renewed and faithful recognition.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, people see Jesus, but rarely all at once, and rarely without distortion. Expectations blur vision. Confidence creates blind spots. Even devotion can become misaligned. Lent names these realities not to discourage faith, but to refine it.

This study assumes that:

- Faith is something we continue to grow into, not master.
- Clarity often comes through examination rather than certainty.
- Seeing Jesus more clearly requires humility, patience, and courage.

Each week engages Scripture deeply, drawing on theology, Biblical commentary, cultural reflection, and creative expression. Art, music, poetry, and visual imagination are used not as decoration, but as tools for theological insight, helping participants notice what the text itself is revealing.

This is not a study about self-improvement. It is a study about conversion of vision.

As the weeks progress, participants are invited to:

- Notice where their vision has been shaped or distorted.
- Examine how faith practices both reveal and refract God's light.
- Remain present in discomfort without rushing to resolution.
- Prepare honestly for the cross before arriving at resurrection.

The goal of Lent is not perfect sight. It is faithful attention.

STUDY OVERVIEW

Week	Theme	Focus	Primary Scripture	Secondary Scripture	Page Numbers
Week 1	<i>Seeing the Light</i>	Jesus revealed as the true light who exposes and invites	Luke 1:1–5, 9–14	Isaiah 60:1–5	3-5
Week 2	<i>Blurred Vision</i>	Expectations, doubt, and faithful questioning	Luke 7:18–35	Isaiah 35:1–10	6-8
Week 3	<i>Blind Spots</i>	Religious confidence, misalignment, and interior examination	Luke 11:33–44	Isaiah 1:10–20	9-11
Week 4	<i>What Jesus Really Said</i>	Attention, desire, and the danger of divided sight	Luke 12:22–34	Psalms 119:33–40	12-14
Week 5	<i>Seeing What We Missed</i>	Grief, delayed recognition, and Christ’s quiet presence	Luke 24:13–35	Psalms 77:1–13	15-17
Week 6	<i>Seeing the King Clearly</i>	Misrecognition, power, and the way of peace	Luke 19:28–44	Zechariah 9:9–10	18-19

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

- Each session is designed for 60–75 minutes but can be adapted.
- Groups are encouraged to move slowly, allowing space for silence, reflection, and honest conversation.
- Not every question must be answered. Depth matters more than coverage.
- Leaders are invited to facilitate, not lecture.

This study assumes that transformation happens not through rushing toward answers, but by dwelling faithfully with Scripture and one another.

READING THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Throughout Lent, participants are invited to read through the Gospel of Luke alongside the weekly sessions, allowing the larger story of Jesus’ life and ministry to shape our understanding. Reading Luke slowly and prayerfully helps us notice what we might otherwise miss how mercy, reversal, and grace come into focus over time. This practice is not about covering material, but about learning to see Jesus more clearly and follow him more faithfully.

WEEK ONE — SEEING THE LIGHT

Primary Scripture: Luke 2:25–35 (CEB)

Secondary Scripture: Isaiah 60:1–5, 18–22 (CEB)

ABOUT THIS SESSION

Lent begins not with improvement, but with illumination. Before Jesus calls anyone to change, he reveals what is true. Before repentance, there is revelation. Before clarity of action, there is clarity of sight. This opening week invites us to consider a foundational question for the entire Lenten journey: **What does it mean to truly see?**

In the Gospel of Luke, seeing is never merely physical. It is spiritual perception, or discernment shaped by memory, hope, suffering, patience, and the quiet work of the Holy Spirit. Simeon does not *figure out* who Jesus is. He recognizes him. Lent, then, becomes a season not of striving to see more, but of learning how to see *rightly*.

CULTURAL DISTORTION

Familiarity Masquerading as Clarity

We live in a culture of instant visibility. We scroll, skim, scan, and assume that seeing something quickly means understanding it fully. Familiarity breeds confidence, even when comprehension is thin. This distortion seeps into faith.

Many of us know Jesus well or at least we know *about* him. We know the stories, the seasons, the vocabulary of belief. But Lent asks a sharper question: Has familiarity replaced attentiveness?

Luke introduces Simeon as a countercultural witness. He does not rush toward conclusions. He waits. He watches. He listens. He trusts that clarity comes not from certainty, but from patience shaped by hope.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Visual Art: “*The Presentation in the Temple*” — Rembrandt van Rijn (c. 1627)



Rembrandt’s depiction of the temple scene is striking for what it does *not* emphasize. There is no spectacle. No glowing halo dominating the room. No triumphant posture.

Instead, the light is concentrated and almost fragile, falling primarily on the child in Simeon’s arms. The surrounding figures recede into shadow. The moment is intimate, quiet, easily missed.

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/rembrandt-presentation>

Reflection Prompt (take a moment of silence):

- Where does your eye go first in this painting?
- What remains hidden or obscured?
- What does this suggest about how God's salvation often appears?

Rembrandt seems to understand Luke's theology: salvation rarely arrives loudly. It requires discernment more than attention.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**Seeing as Covenant Faithfulness**

Luke describes Simeon as *righteous and devout*; language deeply rooted in Israel's covenant story. This is not moral perfection; it is relational faithfulness. Simeon lives oriented toward God's promises even when fulfillment feels delayed.

The phrase "the restoration of Israel" carries enormous theological weight. It evokes:

- God's promise to Abraham of blessing for all nations
- God's deliverance through Moses
- God's covenant with David
- The prophetic hope of renewal after exile

Simeon stands in the long tension between promise and fulfillment. Crucially, Luke emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit:

- The Spirit rests on Simeon
- The Spirit reveals truth to him
- The Spirit leads him into the temple

In Luke's Gospel, clarity is not achieved through religious expertise or political power. It is cultivated through Spirit-shaped attentiveness. Jesus enters the temple not as a king, not as a teacher, but as a child, carried, vulnerable, silent. Salvation does not announce itself. It must be recognized. Lent begins by asking whether we are still capable of that kind of recognition.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY**Light That Reveals and Divides**

When Simeon declares, "*My eyes have seen your salvation*," Luke uses language of perception, not mere sight. This is discernment born of waiting. Notice what Simeon says and what he does not say. He does not claim to understand everything. He does not outline a plan for Israel's future. He simply recognizes that God has acted. Jesus is named not as a symbol of salvation, but as salvation itself. Luke insists that redemption is not an idea, policy, or doctrine, it is embodied.

Simeon then names Jesus as light: light for revelation to the Gentiles and Glory for Israel. Light, in Scripture, is never neutral. It reveals truth, but it also exposes resistance. Simeon's words to Mary make this explicit: this child will provoke opposition; hearts will be revealed; clarity will come at a cost. Luke refuses sentimental faith. From the very beginning, Jesus is presented as both consolation and confrontation. To see clearly is not simply to feel reassured, but it is to be changed.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What does “seeing clearly” mean to you spiritually?
- Why do you think Luke begins Jesus’ story with recognition rather than action?
- How does waiting shape the way we perceive truth?

DIGGING INTO SCRIPTURE

(Choose what best fits your group’s rhythm.)

1. Read Luke 2:25–26. What does Simeon’s waiting teach us about hope without timelines?
2. Why is the Spirit’s role emphasized so strongly in Simeon’s clarity?
3. What might it mean to “recognize” God rather than explain God?
4. How does Simeon’s peace differ from certainty or closure?
5. Why does Simeon connect salvation with both joy and suffering?
6. How does Isaiah 60 expand the image of light beyond personal faith to communal calling?
7. Where might familiarity with Jesus dull our attentiveness?
8. What practices help you remain spiritually perceptive rather than reactive?
9. How does this text challenge shallow notions of clarity?
10. Where do you sense God inviting you to see more honestly this Lent?

LENTEN PRACTICE

Practicing Attentive Waiting

Each day this week, sit in silence for three minutes. Do not pray for answers. Do not rehearse requests. Simply pray: “God, teach me how to see.”

Notice what surfaces; not to judge it, but to attend to it.

Write one sentence each day beginning with: *“Today, I noticed...”*

CLOSING PRAYER

God of Light, You do not rush us into clarity.

You invite us into trust.

Slow our hurried vision.

Sharpen our spiritual sight.

Teach us to recognize your presence

even when it arrives quietly, vulnerably, unexpectedly.

As we begin this Lenten journey,

form in us the patience to see and the courage to follow what is revealed.

Through Jesus Christ, the true Light. Amen.

WEEK TWO — BLURRED VISION

Primary Scripture: Luke 7:18–23 (CEB)

Secondary Scripture: Isaiah 35:3–6 (CEB)

ABOUT THIS SESSION

By the second week of Lent, the light has been revealed, but clarity has not yet settled. This week confronts one of the most theologically honest moments in the Gospel of Luke: a faithful prophet questioning the very Messiah he announced.

John the Baptist does not ask from cynicism. He asks from confinement. From disappointment. From unmet expectations. Blurred vision is not the opposite of faith. In Luke’s Gospel, it is often a stage within faith, what happens when reality no longer matches the story, we told ourselves about how God would act. Lent makes space for this moment, not to resolve it quickly, but to inhabit it truthfully.

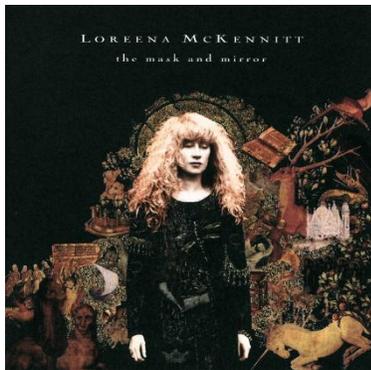
CULTURAL DISTORTION

Certainty as a Measure of Faith

Our culture rewards confidence. We admire clarity, decisiveness, and answers delivered without hesitation. Doubt, especially religious doubt, is often framed as weakness or failure. Church culture can reinforce this distortion. We learn to speak the language of belief fluently, even when our inner world is filled with questions we are afraid to name. Luke refuses that pretense.

By preserving John’s question, Luke insists that faithful people can experience spiritual blur without forfeiting faithfulness. Lent invites us to tell the truth about where our vision has become unclear and to trust that God meets us there.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION



Music: “*Dark Night of the Soul*” — Loreena McKennitt (1994)

This song draws on the language of St. John of the Cross, capturing the experience of faith stripped of certainty when familiar images of God no longer console.

Suggested practice: Listen to a portion of the song together (or read selected lyrics aloud).

LISTEN HERE: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaldzfcBKS>
LYRICS HERE: <https://josvg.home.xs4all.nl/cits/lm/lorecd53.html>

Reflection Prompt (sit with this quietly):

- What happens to faith when comfort disappears?
- How does spiritual darkness differ from spiritual abandonment?
- What might God be forming in seasons when clarity fades?

This is the emotional landscape John inhabits, not disbelief, but spiritual disorientation.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Faith Under Pressure

Luke places John's question at a decisive moment: John is imprisoned. Isolation matters theologically. In Luke's Gospel, confinement often intensifies spiritual testing. Removed from community, silenced from public ministry, and facing the reality of suffering, John is left alone with his expectations.

John expected a Messiah who would confront injustice swiftly, one who would bring judgment alongside renewal. Instead, reports reach him of healings, restorations, and mercy unfolding slowly, quietly, incrementally.

This gap between expectation and experience produces John's question: *"Are you the one... or should we look for another?"* Luke does not frame this as betrayal. He frames it as honesty. John does not abandon hope, but he seeks clarity. Lent honors this kind of faith: faith that questions without walking away.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Revelation Without Explanation

Jesus' response is striking not for what he says, but for what he refuses to do. He does not answer John's question directly. He does not defend his identity. He does not correct John's expectations explicitly. Instead, Jesus points to what is happening:

- the blind see
- the lame walk
- the poor receive good news

This response echoes Isaiah 35, where God's saving work is described not through domination or vengeance, but through restoration of bodies, dignity, and hope.

Jesus reframes messianic clarity away from spectacle and toward transformation. The final line: *"Happy is anyone who doesn't stumble because of me,"* acknowledges the risk inherent in unmet expectations. Jesus knows that disappointment can harden into rejection or mature into deeper trust. In Luke's theology, faith is not defined by certainty, but by perseverance in relationship. Blurred vision becomes not a dead end, but a refining space.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Why is it difficult to admit doubt in religious communities?
- How does disappointment differ from disbelief?
- When has your understanding of God been reshaped by suffering?

DIGGING INTO SCRIPTURE

(Choose what best fits your group's depth and time.)

1. Why do you think Luke preserves John's question so openly?
2. How does imprisonment shape John's understanding of Jesus?

3. Why does Jesus respond with evidence rather than explanation?
 4. What kind of Messiah is revealed through healing rather than force?
 5. How does Isaiah 35 deepen Jesus' response?
 6. What expectations of God have shaped your faith story?
 7. Where have those expectations been challenged?
 8. What does it mean not to "stumble" when God acts differently than we hoped?
 9. How can doubt become spiritually generative rather than destructive?
 10. Where might Jesus be inviting you to trust the work of God even without clarity?
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LENTEN PRACTICE

Naming the Blur

Each day this week, name one place where your faith feels unclear or strained. Pray honestly: "Jesus, this is where my vision is blurred."

Do not rush toward resolution. Let the prayer remain unfinished.

Write one sentence each day beginning with:

"Today, I noticed my faith..."

CLOSING PRAYER

Faithful God,
When our expectations collapse
and our certainty fades,
do not let us confuse confusion with failure.
Meet us in our questions.
Sustain us in the waiting.
Keep us from stumbling
when clarity does not come quickly.
Form in us a faith
that endures not by answers,
but by trust.
Through Jesus Christ,
who meets us in the blur.
Amen.

WEEK THREE — BLIND SPOTS

Primary Scripture: Luke 11:33–44 (CEB)

Secondary Scripture: Isaiah 1:10–20 (CEB)

ABOUT THIS SESSION

By the third week of Lent, Jesus stops adjusting our vision and begins examining it. Blind spots are not places where we refuse to see. They are places where we are convinced, we already do. This session marks a turning point in the Lenten journey. The light has been revealed. The blur has been named. Now Jesus turns the lens inward, toward religious people, practiced believers, and those confident in their spiritual sight.

Luke records this moment not to shame the faithful, but to warn them: It is possible to be deeply religious and quietly misaligned. Lent, at its most honest, is not about self-improvement. It is about self-examination under the light of Christ.

CULTURAL DISTORTION

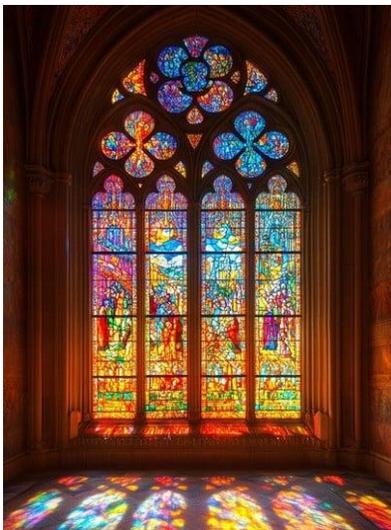
Performative Faith

We live in a culture shaped by appearances. We curate what is visible, manage impressions, and measure success by what can be seen and affirmed. That logic easily enters our spiritual lives.

Faith becomes something we display rather than something that shapes us. We learn the right language, adopt the right habits, and participate in the right rituals often without noticing when these practices stop forming us and start insulating us. Jesus does not condemn discipline. He confronts disconnection. Blind spots emerge when religious practices remain intact, but their purpose is forgotten.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Stained Glass: When Light Is Filtered



Stained glass is designed to work with light, but not without altering it. Clear light enters the window. Colored light emerges inside. Nothing about the light itself is false. But what we see is shaped by what the light passes through. For centuries, stained glass has taught theology visually, telling biblical stories, shaping devotion, and forming imagination. It is beautiful. It is faithful. And it is also selective. Stained glass reminds us of a hard truth Luke names directly: light can be real and still be refracted.

Reflection Prompt (sit in silence for a moment):

- What happens to light as it passes through stained glass?
- How does beauty influence what we trust?
- In what ways can faith shape light and in what ways can it distort it?

Picture Link: https://stockcake.com/i/colorful-stained-glass_1251902_479685

Jesus' warning in Luke 11 is not that the Pharisees lack light, but that the light within them has been filtered in ways they no longer question.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

When Devotion Loses Its Center

Luke situates this confrontation at a shared meal. Jesus is not preaching from a distance or rebuking strangers. He is sitting at a table, inside a relationship of familiarity and trust. This matters. The Pharisees were not careless about faith. They were deeply committed to holiness, Torah observance, and communal faithfulness. Their practices emerged from sincere devotion. But over time, external faithfulness eclipsed internal transformation.

Luke's theology consistently critiques fragmentation when outward devotion no longer reflects inward alignment. Blind spots do not form from neglect, but from unexamined confidence. When practices go unquestioned, they can become substitutes for conversion.

Isaiah's prophetic voice reinforces this critique. God rejects worship that ignores justice not because ritual is wrong, but because ritual without righteousness distorts reality. Lent exposes these distortions not to humiliate, but to realign.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Light That Can Become Darkness

Jesus' metaphor is deceptively simple: *"Your eye is the lamp of your body."* In Scripture, the "eye" represents perception and how one interprets reality. A healthy eye produces clarity; a damaged eye distorts everything downstream. The danger Jesus names is subtle and severe: It is possible to believe we are full of light while remaining spiritually blind. Jesus' critique of the Pharisees centers on misalignment: attention to external purity and neglect of justice, generosity, and love for God

Luke frames this not merely as hypocrisy, but as misdirected vision. The problem is not that the Pharisees practice religion, it is that their practices no longer lead them toward God's heart. Isaiah intensifies the warning. Worship divorced from justice becomes noise. Ritual without compassion becomes spiritual blindness disguised as devotion. True illumination requires humility, the willingness to examine the lens, not just admire the light.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Why are blind spots hardest to recognize in ourselves?
- How can religious traditions both reveal and refract truth?
- Where does familiarity make faith harder to examine?

DIGGING INTO SCRIPTURE

(Choose what best fits your group's rhythm and depth.)

1. What does Jesus mean by a "healthy" eye in Luke 11?
2. How can faith appear full of light while remaining distorted?
3. Why does Jesus raise this issue in the context of a meal?
4. What dangers emerge when outward devotion replaces inner transformation?
5. How does Isaiah 1 challenge worship that looks faithful but lacks justice?

6. What blind spots tend to develop in faithful, committed people?
7. How does humility function as spiritual clarity?
8. Where might religious certainty hinder growth?
9. What does it mean to let faith be examined rather than defended?
10. Where do you sense Jesus inviting deeper alignment this Lent?

LENTEN PRACTICE

Examining the Interior

Choose one religious or spiritual habit you practice regularly.

This week, ask:

- Why do I do this?
- What is it shaping in me?
- Where might it be filtering God's light in unhelpful ways?

Pray daily: "Jesus, shine your light where I cannot see."

Let the prayer remain open-ended.

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God,
You are pure light,
yet we see you through fragile lenses.
When our faith filters out justice,
interrupt us with truth.
When beauty replaces obedience,
call us back.
Examine our vision.
Heal what is misaligned.
Shape us into people
who let your light pass through us
without distortion.
Through Jesus Christ,
the true light of the world.
Amen.

WEEK FOUR — WHAT JESUS REALLY SAID

Primary Scripture: Luke 4:16–30 (CEB)

Secondary Scripture: Isaiah 58:6–12 (CEB)

ABOUT THIS SESSION

Up to this point in Lent, the work has been largely interior. We have practiced attentiveness. We have named disappointment. We have examined blind spots. Now the tension shifts.

In Week Four, clarity moves from personal insight to public consequence. Jesus is no longer misunderstood from a distance, he is heard clearly, and the response is swift and violent. This text forces a sobering realization: Sometimes resistance to Jesus is not caused by confusion, but by understanding. This session asks not *whether* we hear Jesus clearly, but whether we are prepared for what clarity demands.

CULTURAL DISTORTION

Selective Hearing as Faithfulness

We live in a culture skilled at curation. We highlight what affirms us, mute what challenges us, and reframe what unsettles us. That instinct follows us into Scripture. We often assume disagreement with Jesus stems from misunderstanding. Luke suggests otherwise. In Nazareth, the people understand Jesus perfectly and that understanding enrages them. The danger is not ignorance. The danger is selective obedience. Lent exposes how easily faith becomes an exercise in listening only for what reassures us.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION (TEXT-BASED)

Excerpt from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937):

“The Word of cheap grace has been the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

Reflection Prompt (sit with this slowly):

- What makes grace feel “cheap” rather than costly?
- Why do you think people resist the idea that grace might demand change?
- How does this text illuminate the reaction to Jesus in Nazareth?

Bonhoeffer helps us name what the Nazareth crowd experiences: grace that disrupts identity, privilege, and control does not feel like grace at all.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

When Familiarity Turns Hostile

Luke deliberately places this scene at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Before miracles multiply, before crowds gather, Jesus defines his mission in his hometown synagogue. He reads from Isaiah 61, a text announcing liberation, healing, and divine favor, and then makes a staggering claim: *"Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it."*

At first, the crowd is impressed. Luke notes their admiration for Jesus' words. But approval quickly turns to suspicion: *"Isn't this Joseph's son?"* This question is not curiosity, but it is resistance. Jesus then does something extraordinary. He interprets his mission not through Israel's privilege, but through God's mercy extended beyond it. He invokes Elijah and Elisha, prophets who bypassed Israel's insiders to bring healing to outsiders. This is the turning point. The issue is not whether God acts. The issue is for whom God acts and at whose expense. Lent reveals that clarity often threatens the systems we depend on to feel secure.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

When the Word Is Heard and Rejected

Luke is explicit: the crowd understands Jesus. Their rage is not confusion; it is clarity colliding with self-interest. Jesus exposes a dangerous assumption: that belonging guarantees blessing. By naming God's freedom to act beyond familiar boundaries, Jesus dismantles the idea that God's grace can be contained, controlled, or claimed.

Isaiah 58 reinforces this critique. True faith, the prophet insists, cannot be separated from justice, generosity, and repair. Worship that does not lead to liberation is false illumination. The crowd's response, driving Jesus to the edge of a cliff, is the logical conclusion of threatened identity. When Jesus redefines who belongs, he destabilizes everything they assumed about themselves.

Yet Luke ends the scene quietly: *"But he passed through the crowd and went on his way."* Jesus does not retaliate. He does not revise the message. He simply continues. Seeing clearly does not guarantee acceptance. But it does demand faithfulness.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Why does clarity sometimes provoke anger instead of repentance?
- How do identity and belonging shape what we are willing to hear?
- When has Scripture challenged something you assumed was unquestionable?

DIGGING INTO SCRIPTURE

(Choose what best fits your group's depth and time.)

1. Why do you think Luke places this story so early in Jesus' ministry?
2. What shifts the crowd from admiration to rage?
3. How does familiarity with Jesus become a liability in this text?
4. Why are Elijah and Elisha such provocative examples?

5. What does Jesus reveal about God's freedom in this passage?
 6. How does Isaiah 58 clarify the cost of true worship?
 7. Where might faith be confused with self-preservation?
 8. What truths do we tend to spiritualize rather than live?
 9. How do communities react when clarity threatens power or privilege?
 10. Where might Jesus' words still provoke resistance today, including in the church?
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LENTEN PRACTICE

Listening Without Editing

Each day this week, read a short passage of Scripture—slowly.

Do not ask:

- *What does this mean to me?*
- *How does this comfort me?*

Ask instead: "What does this require of me?"

Write one sentence each day beginning with:
"If I take this seriously..."

CLOSING PRAYER

God of Truth,
You speak words that heal
and words that unsettle.
When we are tempted to soften your voice
or edit your demands,
give us courage to listen fully.
Free us from faith that only comforts
and form in us a faith that follows.
Through Jesus Christ,
who spoke clearly and walked on.
Amen.

WEEK FIVE — SEEING WHAT WE MISSED

Primary Scripture: Luke 24:13–35 (CEB)

Secondary Scripture: Psalm 77:1–13 (CEB)

ABOUT THIS SESSION

By the fifth week of Lent, we arrive at a quiet truth: Even after everything we have learned, even after clarity has been sharpened, even after resurrection has occurred, Jesus can still walk beside us unrecognized. The road to Emmaus is not a story about ignorance. It is a story about grief. The disciples do not lack information. They know what happened. What they lack is a way to imagine hope that still makes sense of loss. This session invites us to sit with delayed recognition, to trust that God is present even when understanding comes slowly, and sometimes only in retrospect.

CULTURAL DISTORTION

Closure as Healing

We live in a culture that rushes grief. We prefer explanations to presence and resolution to reflection. We want stories to move quickly from loss to meaning. Luke resists that instinct. The Emmaus story lingers. The disciples talk. They walk. They remember. They misunderstand. Jesus listens longer than he speaks. Healing, Luke suggests, is not found in immediate clarity, but in companionship, Scripture, and shared practice.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION (POETRY)

“The Journey” (excerpt) — Mary Oliver

“One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug at your ankles.

...

But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save the only life you could save.”

Reflection Prompt (read slowly, then pause):

- What does it mean to recognize a voice “slowly”?
- How does grief affect our ability to know what is true?
- In what ways does recognition require movement rather than certainty?

Mary Oliver’s poem names something Luke never states outright: sometimes recognition comes *after* the walking, not before.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Grief That Shapes Vision

Luke situates the Emmaus story on the very day of the resurrection. The irony is intentional. New life has begun—but the disciples still speak in the past tense: “*We had hoped...*” This phrase reveals not unbelief, but disorientation. Their expectations for Jesus were not wrong, but they were incomplete. They imagined redemption without crucifixion, victory without suffering.

Luke emphasizes that Jesus does not correct them immediately. He walks with them. He listens. He lets them tell the story as they understand it. Only then does he reinterpret Scripture—not to erase their grief, but to place it within a larger story God has been telling all along.

Recognition, in Luke’s theology, is not instantaneous. It is formed through presence, memory, and practice.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

When Hearts Burn Before Eyes Open

Luke tells us the disciples’ eyes were “kept from recognizing” Jesus. This is not punishment. It is preparation. Understanding begins internally before it becomes visible. Luke names this moment carefully: “*Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road?*” Notice the order: hearts burn first and eyes open later

Recognition finally comes at the table when bread is taken, blessed, broken, and given. This moment echoes Luke’s Gospel again and again: God is made known not through power, but through self-giving presence. And then Jesus vanishes. Luke is making a profound theological claim: resurrection does not mean constant visibility. Christ is recognized in Scripture, in shared life, and in broken bread—but never possessed or controlled. Seeing clearly does not mean holding tightly. It means trusting deeply.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Why do you think Jesus allows misunderstanding to linger?
 - How does grief shape what we are able to see or hear?
 - Where has recognition come to you only in hindsight?
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DIGGING INTO SCRIPTURE

(Choose what best fits your group’s depth and time.)

1. What emotions dominate the disciples’ conversation on the road?
2. Why is “*we had hoped*” such a powerful—and painful—phrase?

3. How does Jesus' interpretation of Scripture reshape the story without denying the pain?
4. Why does recognition happen at the table rather than earlier?
5. What do you make of Jesus disappearing once he is recognized?
6. How does Psalm 77 mirror the movement from lament to remembering?
7. Where have you experienced God's presence only after the fact?
8. What practices help you remain open when clarity is delayed?
9. How does this story challenge rushed versions of healing?
10. Where might Christ be walking beside you now, unrecognized?

LENTEN PRACTICE

Practicing Sacred Retrospection

Each evening this week, reflect on your day.

Ask:

- Where did I feel heaviness?
- Where did something stir—quietly, unexpectedly?

Pray: "Jesus, show me where you were walking with me today."

Write one sentence beginning with:

"Looking back, I notice..."

CLOSING PRAYER

Risen Christ,
You walk with us
when grief clouds our vision
and hope feels fragile.
Open the Scriptures to us.
Meet us in ordinary moments.
Teach our hearts to recognize you
even when our eyes are slow.
Stay with us, Lord,
for the day is nearly over.
Amen.

WEEK SIX — SEEING THE KING CLEARLY (*Palm Sunday*)

Primary Scripture: Luke 19:28–44 (CEB)

Secondary Scripture: Zechariah 9:9–10 (CEB)

ABOUT THIS SESSION

Palm Sunday is often framed as celebration. Luke frames it as revelation wrapped in grief. Jesus is finally recognized as king, but not understood. The crowd sees him clearly enough to praise him, but not clearly enough to follow him.

This final Lenten session confronts a difficult truth: It is possible to recognize Jesus and still resist his way. Luke’s Palm Sunday does not end in triumph. It ends in tears. The king who arrives in humility weeps over a city that longs for peace but cannot accept the path that leads to it.

CULTURAL DISTORTION

Victory Without Transformation

We live in a culture that celebrates momentum, visibility, and winning. We equate success with strength and leadership with dominance. Those instinct shapes our expectations of God. We want a king who conquers without suffering, restores without disruption, and brings peace without asking anything costly of us. Palm Sunday exposes how easily enthusiasm can replace discipleship. The crowd proclaims the right words but imagines the wrong kingdom.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Hymn Text – “All Glory, Laud, and Honor” (United Methodist Hymnal, #280)

All glory, laud, and honor
to thee, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.
Thou art the King of Israel,
thou David’s royal Son,
who in the Lord’s name comest,
the King and Blessed One.

Reflection Prompt (read slowly):

- What does this hymn assume about kingship?
- What expectations does it carry about victory, honor, and glory?
- How does singing this hymn *before* Holy Week shape or distort our understanding?

This hymn is honest without being cynical. It allows praise to stand, even while Luke invites us to question whether praise alone is enough.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A King Who Refuses Our Definitions

Luke carefully shapes this moment. Jesus rides a colt, fulfilling Zechariah’s vision of a king who comes humble and peaceful, not triumphant and violent. The crowd proclaims peace “in

heaven,” but Luke notably stops short of declaring peace on earth. Something is unresolved. Then comes the most distinctive element in Luke’s account: Jesus weeps.

Luke alone records Jesus’ tears here. They are not tears of fear, but of grief. Jesus sees what the city cannot: that it desires peace while rejecting the way peace comes. The king does not condemn the crowd. He mourns for them. Palm Sunday reveals a Messiah who refuses to become the king people expect, even when expectation turns into celebration.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Praise Without Understanding

The crowd recognizes Jesus as king. That is not the problem. The problem is *how* they understand kingship. Luke frames this scene with tragic irony. The city that longs for peace rejects the very practices, humility, justice, repentance, that lead to it. Jesus names this sorrow plainly: “*If only you knew on this day the things that lead to peace.*” Palm Sunday teaches us that recognition does not equal discipleship. We can sing hosannas and still resist the cross. We can proclaim Christ as king and still reject the kingdom he brings.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Why does Luke emphasize Jesus’ grief rather than triumph?
- How does Palm Sunday expose our assumptions about power?
- Where do we confuse praise with obedience?

DIGGING INTO SCRIPTURE

1. What kind of king is Jesus intentionally presenting himself to be?
2. How does Zechariah 9 challenge dominant models of leadership?
3. What does it mean to recognize Jesus but misunderstand his mission?
4. Where might faith confuse enthusiasm with transformation?
5. How does this text prepare us for the cross rather than Easter joy?
6. What kind of peace does Jesus offer?
7. Why is that peace so often resisted?
8. How does this passage challenge modern Christian ideas of power?
9. Where might Jesus still weep over what we cannot yet see?

LENTEN PRACTICE

Releasing False Images of Power

This week, name one expectation you carry about how *God should* act.

Pray: “Jesus, teach me the things that lead to peace.”

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, humble King, you arrive in peace
and are met with misunderstanding.

When we want glory without sacrifice, slow us down.

When we want power without surrender, reform our vision.

Teach us the way of peace, even when it costs us more than we expect. Amen.