

*You Say
You Want A*
REVOLUTION?
*40 DAYS IN THE
GOSPEL OF LUKE*

DAN BOONE

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THE FOUNDRY
PUBLISHING

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INTRODUCTION

When you open the Gospel of Luke, you realize immediately that you are in a different neighborhood. The stimulating characters, the fast-moving narrative, the tension between groups, the presence of the outcasts, and the spiral toward a crucifixion make Luke different from the other Gospels. His is also the only Gospel that sets us up for Act II, commonly known as The Acts of the Apostles. Most of the barrier-breaking, boundary-bursting activity of Luke's Gospel continues via the followers of Jesus in the second act.

Maybe the radical difference we note in Luke comes from the thought that Luke himself is an outsider. He begins by addressing Theophilus, a Roman official. Then he rewrites the family tree of Jesus, beginning with Adam rather than with Abraham, in order to connect Jesus to all humans, not just the Jewish ones. But it is obvious that he has many other outsiders in mind: Samaritans, the poor, gentiles of every stripe, powerless women, outcast tax collectors, notorious sinners, soldiers, bleeding women, the ostracized impure, a foot-massaging prostitute, an uninvited banquet guest, party crashers, a complaining widow, Zacchaeus, and a host of other excluded characters who would never be found in the winner's circle.

The ministry of Jesus culminates on a cross of utter rejection. He dies in the same place where the done-with and condemned die. Luke introduces us to a Jesus who makes us uncomfortable. Of course, we have tamed this version

of Jesus well in the American church by politicizing Jesus for our security, wealth, and comfort. But Luke is still there, waiting for us to read the story again.

And what we will find, when we do read it again, is the original expression of social justice. Sadly, the idea of social justice has become a political and even religious hot potato. Political agendas have hijacked the term for their own purposes so that, to those on the opposing end of the political spectrum, the term itself leaves a bad taste in the mouth. But long before this recent occurrence, the church was actively engaged in social justice. And it still is. But the founding narrative of biblical social justice has been lost in the mix. This volume on Luke's Gospel is an attempt to revisit the narrative of Luke as a guiding story of social justice for the people of God. In Luke, we see Jesus doing social justice. Then in Acts, we see his disciples following in his footsteps. The time has come for the church to engage social justice again.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Commentaries on the Gospel of Luke abound. This is not one of them. Across a life of ministry, I have used commentaries with deep appreciation for the remarkable scholarship brought to bear on the ancient texts. These commentaries have spanned the gamut from complex and historical criticism to social customs of biblical days to theological ideas. Each is helpful for the serious student.

The intent of this work on Luke is to connect the primary meaning of the text to the world we encounter today. I have not covered every text but have focused on the primary narratives. And, though I think the Gospel of Luke speaks most acutely to the issue of social justice in our world, I have intentionally sought not to hamstring each text with a social justice implication. Some texts speak more directly to the insiders than to the outsiders.

This devotional has four sections on each text covered.

The Big Idea offers a theological statement or summary description of the issue addressed in the text. It gives context for and explains the tone of the text.

Core Teachings examines and explains key sections of the text, with an emphasis on what we can learn about Jesus and how we can follow more faithfully.

Going Deeper looks at the themes and, by using examples and illustrations, explores what it means to live out our faith daily.

Consider This is comprised of discussion questions for individual or group study and suggestions for daily practices to make the text come alive.

May the same gracious Spirit who inspired Luke to write be with you as you open yourself to the transforming story of Jesus.

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THE VULNERABILITY OF GOD

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26–38

THE BIG IDEA

The incarnation was an act of vulnerability on God's part. This is how God enters into our full humanity and suffers with, for, and in us.

CORE TEACHING

We are vulnerable, and we know it. We have seen high-tech space shuttles disintegrate, leaving no trace of human remains; skyscrapers collapse; stock markets plummet, rearranging retirement plans; companies bought, sold, and moved with city-wrecking swiftness; viruses spread, kill, and mutate; radicals who believe their god has told them to behead us; babies snuffed out in the womb because their timing was inconvenient; the earth poisoned, polluted, and warmed to its destruction; health disappear at the reading

of a blood test; careers end with the slip of a tongue; hurricanes ravage life for millions; governments fail to deliver financial responsibility; and nations bring the world to the brink of war.

Any serious person who thinks about the way the world is and seems to be headed has reason to feel vulnerable. And we do all kinds of things to cope with our vulnerability. Some of us numb ourselves to it by way of too much TV, sports, novels, eating, or . . . you can fill in the blanks. Some of us busy ourselves to avoid serious thought about life. Some of us power up and create safe zones, our protected space. We guard our space and wall ourselves in from unwelcome intruders and inconvenient people. We live between fearful avoidance and tough posturing. But we're still vulnerable.

Our own vulnerability is why we love Mary, who is the very picture of vulnerability. Look her up in your pictorial dictionary. How tall is she? How old? Where is she standing? What is she wearing? What color is her hair? How is it fixed?

At the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, you can see Mary through the eyes of the artists of the ages. In the composite, she is a mature adult, wears velvet dresses (usually of a deep red), lives in a larger-than-average home, has a chair by the window through which light cascades softly, and she likes to read. This is the Mary of classic art. And she appears to be fully in charge of her space.

But we know better. Mary is in middle school. She wears Walmart or Old Navy clothes at best. She can't read because girls of her day rarely did. Her parents make all the decisions that affect her life, including the one that mandates she be married to an older man named Joseph. We don't know if she even likes him. She lives in a two-bit

town without a McDonald's or even a stoplight. And into the humble life of this child comes the brightly beaming, divine messenger whose name means "God has shown himself mighty." She stands there in her flannel nightgown, her hair braided by her best friend, wearing Big Bird house shoes. If you ask me, this is divine overkill.

Defenseless? I think so. Fragile? Yes. Overwhelmed? Most likely. Vulnerable? Definitely.

That's why we adore her. We can get our human arms around Mary. She's like us. She has had overwhelming stuff happen to her. She has faced life with little power to make it turn out the way she planned. Forces beyond herself have rearranged her life. She's the matron saint of the vulnerable.

If you ever think your story is not in the Bible, go see Mary. We're vulnerable, just like her. Mike and Cheryl lost their baby boy within days of a meningitis diagnosis. Julie died of ovarian cancer, leaving two little girls behind. Emily's husband walked out on her two weeks ago. Tyler is in counseling for depression. He's nine. Aaron can't come back to college next semester because his dad lost a job. Foreign relations aren't exactly going the way we had hoped. Health insurance is no longer a benefit. It's an out-of-pocket expense. Tom is failing high school, but he doesn't care. He just plays Xbox.

We can get our arms around Mary because she seems to know how we feel. But Mary may not be the most vulnerable one in the story. There is one who becomes even more vulnerable—the God who becomes dependent flesh in the womb of a vulnerable Mary. This story may seem to magnify Mary, but it's really about God—and God's vulnerability.

God, the Creator, becomes creature. God, the breath of every living thing, becomes embryo. God, whose hand scoops out oceans, floats in a fetal sac. God, whose voice

splits cedar trees, cries for mother's milk. God, who crushes kings' armies, can't walk. God, who feeds all living things, is hungry. God, who is sovereign, cannot defend himself. God, full of glory, poops and pukes.

On the day that Gabriel came to visit Mary, on the day that the Holy Spirit came upon her, on the day that the power of the Most High overshadowed her, on that day: God became vulnerable. How vulnerable?

Herod hunted him. Hometown folk reached for rocks to stone him. Pharisees criticized him. Family members thought him nuts. A friend turned on him. Liars testified against him. Rulers chickened out on justice and caved in to the demands of a lynch mob. City folk spit on him. Soldiers crucified him. Dying thieves mocked him. Pious leaders taunted him as he died.

That's how vulnerable God became that day in Mary's womb. What happens to us has already happened to God. God came into our vulnerability and met us there.

GOING DEEPER

We tend to prefer Gabriel, messenger of "the God who shows himself mighty." When we are vulnerable, we want to behold a delivering, transforming, world-altering, situation-changing, putting-me-back-in-control kind of God. We ask God to meet us at the intersection of Fixed and Finished.

But God has chosen instead to meet us in the vulnerable Christ, revealing himself at the point of our vulnerability. The saints of the Psalms knew this. It's why they prayed, *I'm afraid. I don't know where to turn. I can't go on much longer. I can't fix this. I'm in a mess of my own making. I've fallen and I can't get up. I'm dying down here. Do you even care?*

Jesus Christ is God's answer to all those prayers. Dare we meet the mighty God at the point of human vulnerability? Browse the Psalms for the cries of vulnerability that were expressed to God. As you pray, focus on all the vulnerable populations of your city and of the world. Is there is a specific ministry of your congregation that serves vulnerable people? Consider interviewing the leaders of this ministry in order to gain a better understanding of the feelings of vulnerability in your community. Then pray with those same leaders.

CONSIDER THIS

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt vulnerable.
2. Put yourself in Mary's shoes. How do you think she felt standing before the mighty angel of God?
3. What danger could there be in thinking about God as vulnerable?
4. How is the characterization of God as vulnerable comforting or disturbing to you?
5. Why do you believe God came this way?