

# Love Letters

*Reading Through the Gospels*



Reading Guide  
Week #8

Mark 15-Luke 4



NEW HORIZON  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Love Letters Reading Guide for Week #8 Mark 15-Luke 4

**A Week in Review.** Last week we moved from the Transfiguration, to the Triumphal Entry, to the Last Supper, and ended with Jesus' arrest. Along the way we watched disciples and religious people struggle to comprehend Who Jesus is and what He's about. Yet the marginal people—the widows, lepers, and children—received Him gladly. The same is true in our day. Ironically, our hearts can be drawn to Jesus even when we don't fully understand. Such is the life of faith to which Jesus is calling His followers.

**This Week's Reading.** This week we conclude the Book of Mark and begin the Book of Luke (introduced below). Mark will end with a dramatic portrayal of the Crucifixion. It's been a fast-paced walk to the cross—but the cross is the central point for Mark. Jesus came to offer His life for the people God cherishes. Can you sense God's personal love for you as you read? Do you find yourself siding with the Savior?

### ○ MONDAY—MARK 15

**Consider.** Today's reading has particular significance. Jesus' opponents have been His fellow countrymen, the Jews. Today, having interrogated and condemned Jesus, the Jews hand Him over to the Romans, their sworn enemies. We see how loathsome their hatred for Jesus has become—they betray their own flesh and blood. When do your emotions cause you to compromise your convictions?

#### **Read.**

- Notice the witnesses at the Crucifixion—passersby, Jewish leaders, criminals. All jeer, taunt, and criticize. Jesus dies very alone and unappreciated. As Jesus hangs on the cross, are you able to recognize your personal sin as the reason for His death?
- Notice the use of the title "King" for Jesus by Pilate (v.2), the crowd (v.12), the soldiers (v.18), and the Jewish leaders (v.32). Consider the paradox: Jesus' true identity is spoken in derision by His executors. If you are a Christ-follower, at what times is your

confession of Jesus as King not demonstrated by your words, thoughts, or actions?

**Reflect.** "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (v.34). Scholars call Jesus' words from the cross, the "Cry of Dereliction." Kelber writes, "God's nonintervention, His abandonment of Jesus in the hour of greatest need, constitutes the ultimate depth of Jesus' suffering." What is your emotion when you realize that Jesus suffered separation from the Father so we will never have to?

### ○ TUESDAY—MARK 16

**Consider.** Today we discover a dilemma: Where does the Gospel of Mark end? Most translations end with 16:20. However, you may find notation in your Bible indicating the "earliest and most reliable manuscripts" end at 16:8. Other notations may refer to other endings, too. What? Many scholars believe the "shorter ending" (ending with v. 16:8) is the most accurate. They suggest that the "longer ending" (ending with 16:20) is a compilation of teachings from Paul and the other Gospel writers.

#### **Read.**

- Perhaps Mark actually ends at v.16:8—the women fleeing from the tomb and telling no one. If so, what do you suppose Mark is emphasizing with his abrupt ending?
- Perhaps Mark actually ends with v.16:20—Christ's Ascension. If so, what might Mark be emphasizing with this longer ending?

**Reflect.** How does the debate over the ending of the Book of Mark affect the way you think about Scripture? How does it affect your understanding of God? (Care for a more in-depth discussion? Consider listening to New Horizon's podcasts on "Why the Word?" found on our website, [newhorizonchurch.org](http://newhorizonchurch.org).)

### Introduction to the Book of Luke

**The Book.** The Gospel of Luke is a wonderfully crafted and detailed story of Jesus. The Gospel portrays Jesus as very "accessible"—welcomed, beloved, and caring. Here we see the human side of Jesus, as well as His diety. Most scholars

believe Luke was written after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, perhaps 70's or 80's AD.

**The Writer.** Dr. Luke (see Colossians 4:14) is the only Gentile (non-Jewish) Gospel writer, and perhaps the only Gentile writer in the entire New Testament. If he is also the author of the Book of Acts (see discussion for Luke 1), Luke writes more of the New Testament than any other writer.

**As You Read.** Luke offers us his "investigative reporting" of "the things that have been fulfilled among us" (1:2) in the life and ministry of Jesus. We see something significant here: Luke's writing has been verified by the earliest community of believers. It is the product of a young and growing church, learning, thinking, living, and becoming. We are not alone in our walk. The Church has a long history, and we travel in the tracks of countless believers who have gone before us.

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### ○ WEDNESDAY—LUKE 1

**Consider.** Luke is writing an "orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (v.3b). The Book of Acts also begins by addressing "Theophilus," leading most scholars to believe that Luke wrote Acts as a sequel to his Gospel. We don't know who Theophilus is, but the name means "lover of God." It's possible that the book is intended for *all who are lovers of God*. Would you describe yourself in these terms?

**Read.**

- Luke offers our only story of John the Baptist's birth. Notice how Luke weaves the parallel stories of John's and Jesus' births: angels, amazement, and songs from Mary and John's father. What might Luke be communicating about the interconnectedness of John's and Jesus' ministries?
- When the angel Gabriel visits John's father, Zechariah asks for a sign and is chastized (v.18). When Gabriel visits Mary, she responds, "I am the Lord's servant...may it be to me as you have said" (v.38), and is blessed. Which is your typical response to God's promptings—sensitivity or faith?

**Reflect.** John's and Jesus' parents recognize God's purpose for their lives, and yield themselves for God's glory. Do you recognize

your life as having unique purpose for God? Is it the goal of your life to live into that purpose?

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### ○ THURSDAY—LUKE 2

**Consider.** Notice Luke's highly attuned, doctor-like observational skills: He will name Roman Caesars (kings), governors, rulers, and religious leaders, and will use precise geographical locations, etc.—more historical and cultural detail than any other Gospel writer. Does it encourage your faith to know that Jesus' ministry is anchored in human history?

**Read.**

- In Luke, Jesus is a friend of outcasts and fringe people: The angels appear to shepherds (v.8); Simeon (v.25) and Anna (v.36) hold baby Jesus in the temple, etc. Speculate: Why might Luke be making this point to the early church?
- Luke will refer to the temple in Jerusalem throughout his book. For example, Luke begins with Zechariah in the temple (1:9); Jesus' parents present their Child in the temple (2:22); and the book will end with the disciples in the temple (24:53). Why might Luke be reminding the early church of their connection with the temple?

**Reflect.** Unlike Mark's rapid pace, Luke has lingered in his storytelling—we've finished two chapters and Jesus is still a boy. He's building our anticipation as he introduces characters and sets the stage. What details of Jesus' birth and childhood struck you as you read today?

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### ○ FRIDAY—LUKE 3

**Consider.** After a detailed "prologue," Luke launches into his telling of the Gospel. As with Matthew and Mark, he begins with the ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. As you read, what similarities and differences do you find between all three?

**Read.**

- As this chapter begins, Luke notes both secular and Jewish leaders. Jesus is born into a politically and religiously charged arena. In what ways does this resemble the Church in today's world?

- Notice John the Baptist's message in Luke: Repent, be baptized, and "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (v.9). Now notice his demands upon the crowd, tax collectors, and soldiers (v.10, 12, 14). Luke stresses faith, plus the *moral* implications of faith—blameless living. Is the "fruit" of your life consistent with your faith?

**Reflect.** Notice how Luke's Genealogy of Jesus extends all the way back to "Adam, the son of God" (v.38). So does yours. How does that make you feel?

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### ○ SATURDAY—LUKE 4

**Consider.** Where does Jesus do the bulk of His preaching and teaching in Luke? In Jerusalem? Actually, He is probably in Jerusalem only during annual feasts. In the countryside? Yes, to a particular degree. But in Luke, Jesus is primarily "in their synagogues" (v.15)—the local community Jewish houses of worship. As you read, take note of the negative response Jesus often receives from God's people. What do you suppose accounts for such a response?

**Read.**

- If Jesus can be tempted, can't we all? Notice the character of each temptation: temptation to be self-serving (v.3); temptation of pride (v.5); temptation to tempt God. How do you face these temptations in your life?
- Notice that this chapter begins and ends with Jesus in the "desert" or "solitary place" (vv.1&42). Between the two Jesus heals and performs miracles, but also experiences rejection. Perhaps Jesus experiences highs and lows in His ministry. What are your experiences of the same?

**Reflect.** For Luke, knowing and living Scripture is Jesus' defense against the wicked one. How does Scripture help you in your struggles?

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