

TODAY

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Luke

SESSION 7

The One Thing Needful

Luke 10–11

The seventy, a Samaritan on the Jericho road, two sisters, and the Lord's own prayer

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that the Good Samaritan has an Old Testament ancestor almost no one has read, a company of merciful northern Israelites, men of Samaria, in 2 Chronicles who anoint, clothe, and carry Judah's wounded to Jericho, and that Jesus' answer to the woman who blesses his mother's womb, rightly translated, crowns Mary rather than demoting her.

Catholic Touchstone: Prayer as the disciple's first work: the one thing needful at Mary of Bethany's feet, the Our Father as, in Tertullian's phrase the Catechism borrows, the summary of the whole Gospel (CCC 2761), and the confessor as Good Samaritan (CCC 1465). Tonight also completes a Marian arc: the steelman at 11:27–28 resolves with the very threads Sessions 1, 2, and 6 built.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The journey to Jerusalem is now underway, and Luke fills the road with teaching. First the sending of the seventy (some manuscripts read seventy-two): where the Twelve answered the tribes of Israel, seventy answers the number of the world's nations in Genesis 10 (seventy in the Hebrew text, seventy-two in the Greek, which is why the manuscripts split exactly there). The mission is already sized for the world. They return exulting that even the demons submit, and Jesus lifts their eyes higher: rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Then Luke gives us something rare and precious: Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, thanking the Father for hiding these things from the wise and revealing them to babes. It is the most Trinitarian sentence of joy in the Gospels, and it is aimed at the childlike, a theme Session 11 will finish.

The Good Samaritan (10:25–37) begins with a lawyer's test question and Jesus' counter-question; the lawyer answers his own exam perfectly, Deuteronomy 6:5 joined to Leviticus 19:18, and then, desiring to justify himself, asks the question that births the parable: who is my neighbor? The Jericho road drops some three thousand three hundred feet through bandit country; the priest and Levite pass by on the other side, possibly guarding ritual purity from a corpse, certainly guarding themselves; and the third traveler is the audience's enemy. Tonight's live discovery is one of the study's best-kept secrets: 2 Chronicles 28:8–15, where men of Samaria, at a prophet's word, clothe the naked captives of Judah, anoint them, set the feeble on donkeys, and carry them to Jericho, the city of palm trees. The parable resonates unmistakably with a real story in Israel's own Scriptures in which men of Samaria were the merciful ones, and almost nobody in your group will have read it. Let them find it and gasp. The parable's final twist deserves equal care: the lawyer asked who is my neighbor, defining a category to limit; Jesus asks which of these three proved neighbor, defining a vocation to perform. Go and do likewise. The Fathers also loved a second, Christological reading, and Ambrose gives it to us: the human race is the man half dead, the Law and the priesthood pass by unable to heal, Christ the outsider binds our wounds with oil and wine, carries us on his own beast, and pays the innkeeper, the Church, until he comes back. Both readings are true; teach the moral one first and let the Fathers' reading land as a gift.

Martha and Mary (10:38–42) must be handled without caricature. Martha's service, diakonia, is honorable, the very word for the Church's ministry; her fault is not the kitchen but the anxiety, you are

anxious and troubled about many things. Mary has chosen the one thing needful, the good portion: to sit at the Lord's feet and hear his word, the posture of a disciple before a rabbi, a posture rarely open to women in first-century convention, and Jesus refuses to take it from her. The Church has always read the sisters as the contemplative and active lives, and the point is not that action is wrong but that it must flow from listening or it curdles into anxiety. Luke immediately proves the point with his next scene: the disciples watch Jesus praying and ask, Lord, teach us to pray.

Luke's Our Father (11:1–4) is shorter than Matthew's, five petitions, and the Catechism calls the Lord's Prayer the summary of the whole Gospel (CCC 2761, quoting Tertullian). The friend at midnight and the ask-seek-knock sayings follow, with Luke's own punchline: where Matthew has the Father giving good things, Luke has him giving the Holy Spirit to those who ask. The Beelzebul controversy, the finger of God (Exodus 8:19's phrase for what Pharaoh's magicians could not fake), and the strong man despoiled carry the kingdom's claim. Then the moment tonight's steelman lives in: a woman in the crowd cries, blessed is the womb that bore you, and Jesus answers, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it (11:27–28). Read badly, it demotes his mother. The Greek particle *menoun* can be read either as a correction (rather) or as an escalation (yes indeed, and more than that); even on the corrective reading, what Jesus redirects attention to is a description of exactly one person Luke has been portraying since chapter 1: the one who heard the word (let it be to me according to your word), was blessed for believing it (blessed is she who believed), and kept it in her heart, twice (pondering it, Luke tells us, the first time). The steelman must be given at full strength, many Protestant readers take this verse as Jesus deflecting Marian devotion, and then pressed with Luke's own portrait: the beatitude Jesus pronounces is one his mother uniquely fulfills, which is why the Church's veneration of Mary has never competed with hearing and keeping the word. It is what hearing and keeping the word looks like.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Gen 10 (the table of nations) Seventy nations: the mission sized for the world — **Lk 10:1**

Deut 6:4–5 with Lev 19:18 The lawyer's own summary: love God, love neighbor — **Lk 10:27**

2 Chr 28:8–15 Merciful men of Samaria anoint, clothe, and carry Judah's wounded to Jericho — **Lk 10:30–35**

Ex 8:19 The finger of God: what the magicians could not counterfeit — **Lk 11:20**

Jon 3 with 1 Kgs 10:1–13 Nineveh repented; the queen of the South came to hear wisdom — **Lk 11:29–32**

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ambrose of Milan (*Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book VII*)

Ambrose reads the Jericho road as the story of the race: Adam went down from the city of peace and fell among the powers that stripped him of grace and left him half dead. Law and priesthood looked and passed, for they could diagnose but not heal; then Mercy itself came down the road as the despised outsider, bound our wounds with the oil of comfort and the wine that stings, carried us on his own body, and paid the innkeeper until his return. The Samaritan, Ambrose concludes, is the Lord, and the inn is the Church.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (*Sermon 103, on Martha and Mary*)

Augustine will not let the sisters be enemies: Martha's work is good, he preaches, and someone had to feed the Lord; but Martha's portion passes away with the world's need, while Mary chose what will never be taken, for in the kingdom no one serves the hungry where no one hungers. Martha's busy hands are the Church in time; Mary at his feet is the Church in eternity, and we do the first well only by wanting the second more.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage (*On the Lord's Prayer*)

Cyprian, writing scarcely more than two centuries after the upper room, marvels that we dare to say Father: the prayer Christ taught is prayed in Christ's own voice, so that the Father recognizes his Son's words on his children's lips. And because it says our Father and give us, Cyprian insists, Christian prayer is never private property: we pray as one people or not at all, and no one comes to the Father alone.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 2761 The Lord's Prayer as the summary of the whole Gospel, Tertullian's phrase made the Church's own.

CCC 1465 The confessor as the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds: the parable inside the sacrament.

CCC 2601, 2607–2615 Jesus at prayer awakening the disciples' request; his teaching on bold, persistent, filial asking.

CCC 2708–2712 Meditation and contemplative prayer: Mary of Bethany's portion described.

THREAD WATCH

Blessed outsiders (develops strongly tonight): A Samaritan is the parable's hero, on the heels of a Samaritan village refusing Jesus at 9:52–55. Add him to the running tally; the ten lepers in Session 10 continue the line.

Mary hears and keeps (RESOLVING ECHO tonight): The 11:27–28 steelman is the Mary-ponders thread paying a dividend. When you press with 1:38, 1:45, 2:19, and 2:51, the group should recognize every reference; they discovered them all.

Prayer before the hinge (develops): 11:1, the disciples ask because they watched him pray. Keep pointing at Luke's praying Christ.

The journey (ambient): Everything tonight happens on the road. Say so once at the top.

SESSION GOALS

1. Size the mission of the seventy against Genesis 10 and hear Jesus' joy in the Spirit over the childlike.

2. Run the 2 Chronicles 28 discovery live: the merciful men of Samaria who brought Judah's wounded to Jericho, then the parable's who-is-neighbor inversion, then Ambrose's Christological reading as a crown.
3. Read Martha and Mary without caricature: anxiety versus attention, and the one thing needful.
4. Pray the Our Father as catechesis: five petitions, the Father who gives the Holy Spirit.
5. Resolve the 11:27–28 steelman with Luke's own Marian portrait: menoun, and the beatitude Mary uniquely fulfills.

Time Note (75–90 minutes)

If pressed, take the sending of the seventy (Q1) as leader framing in two minutes, and fold the sign of Jonah material into the closing. Never cut Q2 and Q3 (the Samaritan discovery and inversion), Q5 (the Our Father), or Q6 (the Marian steelman); they are tonight's spine. The Beelzebul controversy can live entirely in its Dig Deeper box if the clock demands.

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Father, your Son rejoiced in the Holy Spirit that you reveal your mysteries to the little ones. Make us little enough to see. Teach us tonight to pray as he prayed, to sit where Mary sat, and to go where the Samaritan went, and let nothing we do flow from anxiety instead of your word. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

W1. Who taught you to pray, and what is the first prayer you remember knowing by heart?

W2. When your week gets overloaded, what is the first thing you drop? Be honest about where prayer sits on that list.

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT (50–60 MIN)

HOW TO LEAD THIS SECTION

Tonight's crown jewel is the 2 Chronicles discovery at Question 2; give it a full ten minutes and let the group's astonishment do the teaching. The Marian steelman closes the Build; by then the group will have every text they need already in hand from Sessions 1 and 2.

1. Read Luke 10:1–3, 10:17–24. Why seventy (or seventy-two) this time instead of twelve? Skim Genesis 10 and count what it catalogs. And when the missionaries return thrilled about demons, where does Jesus redirect their joy?

Leader: *Genesis 10 lists the nations of the world, seventy in the Hebrew count, seventy-two in the Greek. The mission is scaled to the map. Joy belongs to names written in heaven, not to spiritual success.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Twelve answered the tribes of Israel; seventy answers the table of nations in Genesis 10, the whole Gentile world in miniature (the Hebrew text counts seventy nations, the Greek seventy-two, which is exactly why the manuscripts of Luke split between the two numbers). Luke, the Gentile evangelist, is drawing the mission's map early. And when the seventy return high on results, Jesus reorders their joy: do not rejoice that the spirits submit, rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Ministry success is a poor foundation for joy; election and grace are bedrock. Then Luke shows us something found nowhere else: Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, thanking the Father for revealing to babes what the wise cannot see. Keep that word babes; Session 11 finishes the thought.

2. Live discovery: Read Luke 10:25–35, the Good Samaritan, and gather its details: oil and wine, bound wounds, a beast to ride, the road to Jericho. Now the hunt: find 2 Chronicles 28:8–15 and read it aloud. What did the men of Samaria once do, at a prophet's word, for the wounded of Judah, and where did they carry them?

Leader: Give them time; almost no one knows this text. The finds: the men of Samaria clothed the naked captives, anointed them, carried the feeble on donkeys, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees. The parable's details echo their own Scriptures.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Buried in 2 Chronicles is the Good Samaritan's ancestor: northern Israelites of Samaria, whom later tradition connects with the Samaritans, take Judah captive, and at the prophet Oded's rebuke they rise, clothe the naked prisoners from the spoil, anoint them, set all the feeble on donkeys, and deliver them to Jericho. Luke supplies oil, wine, a beast, and the Jericho road; 2 Chronicles adds clothing, food and drink, anointing, donkeys, and Jericho itself. The parable echoes the lawyer's own Bible, in which men of Samaria had already once been the merciful ones. Whether or not Jesus alludes to it directly, Israel's own Scriptures already held a memory of Samaritan mercy that this parable awakens. And its closing twist is the real blade: the lawyer asked who is my neighbor, seeking a boundary; Jesus asks which of these three proved neighbor, assigning a vocation. Neighbor is not a category you screen others into. It is a thing you go and become: go and do likewise.

3. The Fathers read this parable a second way, from inside. Hear St. Ambrose's reading from the Voices box: the wounded man is the human race, the Samaritan is Christ, the inn is the Church. What does each detail become in that reading, and what does it get right about the Gospel that the moral reading alone misses?

Leader: Walk the allegory gently: oil and wine as the sacraments' comfort and sting, his own beast as the Incarnation carrying us, the two coins and the promised return. It supplements, not replaces, the moral reading.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

In the Fathers' reading, humanity is the traveler who went down from peace and fell among robbers, stripped of grace and left half dead; the priest and Levite are the Law and the sacrifices, able to see the wound but not to heal it; and the despised outsider who comes where we are is Christ, binding wounds with oil and wine, carrying us on his own body, lodging us in the inn of the Church, and paying in advance until he comes again. The Catechism itself calls the confessor the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds (CCC 1465). What the allegory protects is the parable's deepest truth: before go and do likewise is possible, it must be received. We love as neighbors because we were first the man in the ditch, and Someone stopped.

4. Read Luke 10:38–42. Name precisely what Jesus corrects in Martha, and what he refuses to take from Mary. What is the one thing needful, and what happens to service when it stops flowing from it?

Leader: Guard Martha from caricature: her *diakonia* is honorable; the correction is anxious and troubled, not hardworking. Mary's posture, at his feet hearing his word, is a disciple's place.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Jesus does not correct Martha's serving, Luke honors it with the Church's own word for ministry, *diakonia*; he corrects the anxiety devouring it: you are anxious and troubled about many things.

Mary has taken the posture of a disciple before a rabbi, at his feet, hearing his word, a seat convention rarely offered women, and Jesus rules it will not be taken away from her. The one thing needful is not a rebuke of kitchens but an ordering of loves: action that flows from listening feeds people; action cut off from listening frays into resentment, as Martha's does you-statement proves (do you not care?). St. Augustine's balance holds: Martha's portion is good and passes with the world's need; Mary's portion is better and never ends. The Church needs both sisters, in that order, in each of us.

5. Read Luke 11:1–13. The disciples do not ask for a sermon on prayer; they ask because they watched him pray. Walk the five petitions of Luke's Our Father slowly. Then look at verse 13: what, in Luke's version, does the Father give to those who ask him?

***Leader:** Take the petitions one by one and keep it devotional, not academic. The punchline: Matthew's good things becomes Luke's the Holy Spirit.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Luke's form is lean: Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, give us each day our daily bread, forgive us our sins as we forgive, lead us not into temptation. Praise before petition, God's name and reign before our bread and debts, and the terrifying reciprocity of forgiveness in the middle. The Catechism, borrowing Tertullian, calls this prayer the summary of the whole Gospel (CCC 2761), and St. Cyprian saw why it says our and us throughout: no one prays it alone even when praying it alone. Then the promise beneath all asking: if evil fathers give good gifts, how much more will the heavenly Father give **the Holy Spirit** to those who ask him. Luke names the gift behind every gift. Prayer's final answer is not things; it is God's own indwelling life, which is why persistence (the friend at midnight) is not nagging heaven but enlarging the vessel.

DIG DEEPER: THE FINGER OF GOD

Answering the Beelzebul slander, Jesus says: if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (11:20). The phrase is Exodus 8:19, the magicians of Pharaoh conceding the plague they could not counterfeit: this is the finger of God. The exorcisms are the plagues of a new Exodus, the strong man's house despoiled, and the tradition heard one more overtone: the ancient hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* calls the Holy Spirit *digitus paternae dexteræ*, the finger of the Father's right hand.

6. Steelman chain: Read Luke 11:27–28. A woman cries out, blessed is the womb that bore you, and Jesus answers, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. The strong Protestant reading: Jesus deliberately redirects honor away from his mother to obedience, and Marian devotion repeats the woman's mistake. Give that reading its full force. Then prosecute it against Luke's own Gospel: who, in everything we have read since Session 1, actually fits the beatitude Jesus pronounces?

***Leader:** Let the Protestant case stand at strength; it is the plain English reading. Then press with the texts the group already owns: 1:38, 1:45, 2:19, 2:51, and the Greek *menoun*, whose ambiguity means the demoting reading is not required by the text.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The steelman deserves respect: read as a rebuttal, the verse makes womb-blessing a mistake to be corrected, and any devotion built on Mary's motherhood totters. But two things resist it. First the particle: *menoun* is genuinely ambiguous in Greek, capable of meaning either rather or yes, and more than that; the demoting reading is a choice, not a necessity. Second, and decisively, Luke's own narrative: who heard the word of God and kept it? The one who answered let it be to me according to your word (1:38), whom Elizabeth blessed both in her motherhood (blessed is the fruit of your womb, 1:42) and, more deeply, in her faith (blessed is she who believed, 1:45), who kept all these things in her heart (2:19, 2:51), pondering them (2:19). Jesus is not demoting his mother; he is naming the deeper reason she is blessed, the reason Luke has been demonstrating for ten chapters. Her physical motherhood was grace given once; her hearing and keeping is discipleship the rest of us can imitate, which is exactly what the Church means by calling her the first disciple. The woman in the crowd was right; Jesus' rather tells us why she was right, and it is tonight's memory verse.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (10 MIN)

S1. Whose ditch do you walk past on the other side of the road, at work, in your family, online? What would stopping actually cost you this week?

S2. Martha was doing good things anxiously. Which of your good commitments has quietly disconnected from prayer, and what is one concrete way to sit down first this week before you serve?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Luke's Our Father slowly once a day, one petition per breath. Ask explicitly for the Holy Spirit at the end; Luke says that is the point.
- Do one hidden Samaritan act this week: planned, costly enough to feel, and told to no one.
- Before next session, read Luke 12:1–13:35: a rich fool, ravens and lilies, a narrow door, and a hen gathering her brood.

Scripture memory: Luke 11:28, *Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!* (RSV2CE)

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Father, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, forgive us as we forgive, and lead us not into temptation. And give us, above every other gift, the Holy Spirit, that we may hear your word as Mary heard it and keep it as she kept it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Leader Reference Card: Session 7

Every passage used tonight, in order of appearance. 2 Chronicles 28 is the secret weapon; do not let anyone see the bookmark.

Passage Used for

Luke 10:1–3, 17–24 Q1: the seventy; joy in the Spirit

Genesis 10 Q1: the table of nations

Luke 10:25–37 Q2–Q3: the lawyer and the Samaritan

Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Leviticus 19:18 Q2: the lawyer's summary

2 Chronicles 28:8–15 Q2 live discovery: the merciful men of Samaria who brought Judah's wounded to Jericho

Luke 10:38–42 Q4: Martha and Mary

Luke 11:1–13 Q5: the Our Father; the Father gives the Holy Spirit

Exodus 8:19 Dig Deeper: the finger of God

Luke 11:14–26 Dig Deeper context: Beelzebul, the strong man

Luke 11:27–28 Q6 steelman: blessed rather; menoun

Luke 1:38, 45; 2:19, 51 Q6: the texts that resolve it

CCC 2761, 1465, 2601, 2607–2615, 2708–2712 Catechism Connection

Next week: Luke 12–13: possessions, providence, and the narrow door. Bookmark Exodus 12:11; a small phrase about belts and lamps is older than it looks, and the group should find its source themselves.