

Encountering Jesus Introduction

From the series, *Encountering Jesus: The Gospel of Luke*

Luke 1:1-4

By Dr. David H. McKinley

Life is a series of encounters that ultimately shape, direct, develop, and impact us on a variety of different levels and through many different seasons in life. Some encounters are quick and fleeting—someone you may say hello to as you go in or out of a store, or maybe a conversation with someone at a coffee shop.

Other encounters are surprising. We meet or run into someone we didn't expect to see or to know.

I'll never forget I was in the Hoosier Dome in Indianapolis, Indiana in the spring of 1992, with my friend and pastor, Jack Graham. At the time, he was President of the Southern Baptist Pastors Conference. We were on a preliminary planning trip to find out what we would need to do to oversee this rather large conference in the Hoosier Dome in June.

After we met with some of the coordinators working with us, we walked down to the exhibit center. When I walked in, I suddenly encountered Terry Gene Bollea from Augusta, Georgia. You may not know the name, Terry Gene Bollea, but this man was massive. He was muscular, and to be honest, he looked really mean. His professional name? Hulk Hogan.

There I was in the Hoosier Dome, prim and proper in my preacher's suit (which we all wore in those days—tie, coat, etc.) and there was the Hulk standing in front of me wearing this massive yellow and red spandex suit. He was doing a little bit of a junket as a preliminary to WrestleMania 8, where he would ultimately face off with Sid Justice and prevail. They were the top billing on the ticket of the event, while the Macho Man and The Nature Boy Ric Flair were on the other aspect of this. All these guys were there and around, but you couldn't miss the Hulk! What a surprising experience that was! Never did I imagine 18 years later I would call Augusta, Georgia my home.

As we walked away from the exhibit center, Dr. Graham looked at me and said, “McKinley, you always run into celebrities wherever you go.” And he was right. I don't know why, but I just have this knack for meeting famous people. This was no different. It was a surprising encounter.

We not only have fleeting and surprising encounters, but there are encounters that are life-shaping and lasting. Maybe you had a life-shaping and lasting encounter somewhere in school—a roommate in college? At the startup of this school term, you may meet someone who will become a lifelong friend! Maybe you started a business and somewhere you met someone who is now your business partner.

There are all kinds of encounters that come our way. For all the life-shaping and lasting encounters in my own life, none has been more significant and satisfying than the day I shared an umbrella in a rainstorm on a college retreat in Kentucky with a beautiful, green-eyed girl named Connie Hall. For the last 46 years, she has been my wife and life companion, and nothing has had greater impact on my life than the love, the journey, and the wonder of all we have seen, known and shared together.

So much of who we are and what we become is ultimately defined through encounters with people. And, of course, some people we meet in life—as I mentioned like my wife—have added so much to the value of who we are.

Then there are encounters with other people that, frankly, bring injury and sometimes leave us with scars, but life is a series of encounters.

Of all the encounters you will ever have with anyone, anywhere, there is no greater single encounter than encountering Jesus! That is the encounter that changes everything. In order to help people like you and me understand why this matters and how it happens—and why we believe it is more than just a myth or a legend—there's a man by the name of Luke whose gospel is the third book in the New Testament and named under his own name, the Gospel of Luke.

Luke was a man who put together not just a timeline of events, but a collection of meaningful encounters and interactions that demonstrate the wonder, power, and glory of knowing Jesus Christ!

Today we're beginning a new series from the book of Luke titled, *Encountering Jesus*. Let's read the Prologue—the opening four verses of Luke. It's a Prologue because it's written as an introduction. The text of the narrative begins in Luke 1:5, but in order to get there, we've got to start with what is said at the beginning. This is how the letter begins:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also” (Luke 1:1-3a).

I'm going to stop there because this is the only reference Luke makes in this entire narrative to himself. He doesn't even tell us his name. He just says, “It seemed good to me also” (Luke 1:3a). And what did he say?

“It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3a-4).

What is the last phrase? Why did Luke write this narrative and compile this gospel? It was in order that “you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4)—that you might have an encounter that has credibility, an encounter that has authority, an encounter that is transforming in

your life because of what you know and understand about Jesus. I love the way Eugene Peterson paraphrased this in *The Message*:

“So you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught” (Luke 1:4 MSG).

Luke wanted us to see through his eyes the encounters with Jesus so that we might have that same encounter with clarity, confidence, and certainty.

As we begin the study of any book, it’s important for me to give you some sense of context and background. I have to be honest, what I’m going to do this morning is not nearly as devotional and inspirational, and may not light your fire the same way future messages might as we move through the book. However, it is vital we understand both the historical and contextual background of what we’re looking at in the book, so let’s explore the background.

1. Explore the Background

Just as you begin a new school year and have orientation to your classes and subjects, to some degree, this is going to be an orientation to the book of Luke. Or just as those who start a new job talk about “onboarding” for the job—learning about the corporation, culture, and responsibilities—this is, in a sense, onboarding in the Gospel of Luke.

I want to make a series of statements by way of background. I have provided an infographic screen so you can simply listen without trying to focus on taking everything down in your notes. Let me also say, every screen used on Sunday is attached to the messages as they’re posted online, so you can get information anytime, any week through the website.

I want to begin by saying that Luke was not one of the prominent figures of the New Testament. He’s not someone we know and read a lot about. As I mentioned earlier, he doesn’t even reference himself except for one time at the beginning in Luke 1:3. Luke was also the human author of the book of Acts, but in neither place does he make much of himself.

What we do know is that Luke was a companion with the Apostle Paul. Luke traveled with Paul, and Luke ultimately was someone mentioned in Colossians 4, 2 Timothy 4, and Philemon 24—obscurely at the end of those books. From these passages, we learn Luke was a physician, a doctor. It could be that he was Paul’s doctor. From Scripture, we know Paul had some sort of infirmity, an affliction that was constantly agitating and irritating him. He pled with the Lord to remove it (see 2 Corinthians 12). But Luke was someone who was a faithful and loyal companion.

As a physician, Luke was a man who was analytical. He knew the importance of history, and he did everything he could to make sure that through his account, we would not come to Jesus saying, “*Okay, close your eyes and just believe,*” but rather, we would understand that our faith is built upon fact and truth.

Luke was a Gentile, a Greek. He is the only New Testament writer who was not Jewish, and this sets him apart from others. In fact, you'll notice the opening portion of his book is very formal, and written in classical Greek style, a style used by historians like Herodotus and Dionysus in order to make sure people saw them as being researched and authoritative. Luke did the same thing in the first four verses. However, when he gets to verse five and begins to tell the story, Luke flips over to what we call *Koine* Greek, or the common language of Greek. The rest of the book of Luke is written in that style. But from the very beginning, Luke made a big deal of this opening because he wanted to portray the sense of clarity, research, and authority backing up what he had to say.

He also wrote/addressed this letter to a Roman by the name of Theophilus: "to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3b). Many Bible scholars believe the name, Theophilus, came from a mother, who, when she saw him, held him and said, "This is the awfulest baby I have ever..." No, I'm kidding. You know it's not the truth—had to go there!

The name, Theophilus, means *loved or beloved of God*. Luke was writing to this one named Theophilus, the loved one of God, because Luke wanted this man to know and understand the wonder of God's love seen in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We know Luke not only wrote to Theophilus in the book of Luke, but Luke wrote the book of Acts—the companion book to Luke—and addressed Theophilus in the introduction of that book too.

Luke is the longest book in the New Testament—not by chapters, but by words. In fact, the Gospel of Luke has 25,460 words. Compare that with Third John, which is made up of 298 words. When I think about one of the books of Paul, the book of Romans, where he articulated the constitution of Christianity—the Doctrine of the Faith—I think about it being a large, comprehensive statement about justification, sanctification, glorification, salvation, redemption, etc. I was fascinated to learn the book of Romans is made up of 9,422 words, compared to the 25,000+ words in the Gospel of Luke. In fact, if you take the books of Luke and Acts and put them together, Luke wrote 50,178 words that are found in the text of the New Testament. If you take all thirteen of the letters Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul's compilation is 43,293.

Needless to say, Luke was a wordy guy, and I like that because I'm a wordy preacher! But as a medical doctor, Luke knew the importance of analytics and analysis. From the beginning, he wanted to create an "orderly account" (Luke 1:3b). That phrase, *orderly account*, literally means *I want to take it from the top*. Luke was basically saying, *"I want to walk you through all the things I've learned based upon research on what's found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, [Matthew and Mark predate Luke], and I want to hear not only from those sources, but the very eyewitnesses!"*

The word, *eyewitness*, is the Greek word, *autoptēs*, from which we get our word, *autopsy*. And what is an autopsy? It is a careful examination and a processing of what has happened in a body at the time of death to determine all factors that may have led to that moment. Just as we continue to perform autopsies in our day for clarification, answers, and understanding, Luke said, *"I have looked at the eyewitnesses. I have done and listened to the autopsy of others and added my own in order that I*

might be able to provide you with an understanding of what was found—something real, reliable, and personal. Therefore I'm giving you a written record of my findings."

Something else that we see in this passage is not only the autopsy of the findings, but what Luke oftentimes refers to as *biblical inspiration*. When Luke talks about other portions of Scripture—the Old Testament—and other writings of the nature of Jesus found in the New Testament, Luke often refers to them as the *Scriptures* or the *Word of God*. Luke understood the significance of that.

Finally, just by way of background, Luke is the most extensive gospel account. Many have said that it is the most beautiful book in all the world because it is the most comprehensive picture of the life and the ministry of Jesus.

2. Examine the Content

This morning, I would like to just take a rock and skip it across Luke in order to touch on but a few things. These are the things I want you to know and understand as we look at the book of Luke.

Bruce Larsen in his commentary on Luke compiled several significant themes of the book. I found this information helpful and used his thoughts and some of my own to create the following list:

- **Luke is a Gospel of Stories**

Luke has more stories than any of the other gospels. He identifies 50 different people, includes 18 to 20 parables, mentions 20 miracles, and covers 60 to 65 different stories in the gospel. So, Luke is a big picture story book.

- **Luke is a Gospel of Joy**

The theme of joy and rejoicing is repeated throughout Luke from the very beginning. When Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, conceived (after being barren for many years), Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, came to visit. There's this whole story about how that baby, John (in Elizabeth's womb), kicked and leapt for joy at the appearance of Mary (and Jesus in Mary's womb). The themes of joy and rejoicing begin there, and continue throughout the entire book, even to the last chapter.

- **Luke is the Missional Gospel**

Luke's great intention was to make it clear that Jesus was not an exclusive Jewish Messiah, but that He was the Son of Man, the Savior of the whole world. He presented Jesus as the universal Savior. If you look at the gospels and compare them, each gospel has some thematic element, some sort of signature about the writing and emphasis of the gospel writer.

Different Perspectives:

Mark—Ministry of Jesus, Mark 10:45

Matthew—Prophecy Jesus Fulfilled (Jewish Emphasis), Matthew 1:21-23

John—Deity of Christ, John 1:1-4

Luke—Humanity of Jesus, Luke 19:10

For example, when you read the Gospel of **Mark** (the earliest of the gospels), Mark does a quick run through the ministry of Jesus. Mark tells us in quick, rapid fashion that Jesus did this and Jesus did that. When reading the Gospel of Mark, you feel like you're fast walking and moving from each person in each event, but not a lot of detail—this happened, that happened, this happened, that happened. Ultimately, the key verse in the Gospel of Mark is this:

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Matthew focuses on the prophecies about Jesus. Repeatedly in the book of Matthew, you read this little phrase, *that it might be fulfilled... that it might be fulfilled*. He wanted people to know, beginning with the genealogy that started with Abraham and goes all the way down through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, and so on, all of this occurred *that it might be fulfilled*, including Matthew 1:21 and following, when Matthew quotes Isaiah:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Isaiah 7:14).

Matthew is saying that from the very beginning, it's all about the prophecy. Jesus is the Messiah!

John focuses on the deity of Christ beginning with John 1:1:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1, 3).

John tells us that Jesus is from eternity past to eternity future. And while He came here and inhabited a human body, He was a one-of-a-kind different person from any other. Jesus is the God/Man!

When we go to **Luke**, we see the humanity of Christ. Everything from the details of Jesus' birth (Luke 1 and 2) and all the way through His suffering, Luke constantly focuses on the humanity of Christ:

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

From that standpoint, Luke wanted everyone to know and understand that Jesus wasn't just a Jewish Messiah or just a teacher; He was the one and only Savior of the world! In fact, in chapter three when Luke begins to give the historical genealogy of Jesus in detail, Luke doesn't go back to Abraham. Luke goes all the way back to Adam. And that emphasis on Adam was an emphasis on the entirety of the human race.

Paul also wrote about this as he was telling the redemptive story:

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—...Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses... But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many” (Romans 5:12, 14a, 15).

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

This is the redemptive story! More than any other gospel writer, Luke portrayed the justification of our lives through faith in Christ because Christ alone can deal with the debt and condemnation of our sin. Author and Bible teacher John MacArthur, who recently went to be with the Lord, said this:

“Luke’s goal was not to produce just another biography of Jesus, though that would have been a noble end in itself. Far more than that, he understood that the gospel is the story of what God accomplishes through Jesus Christ in the lives of sinners.” —John MacArthur

From the very prologue we read in Luke 1:1-4, Luke talks about the things that have been accomplished among us. He was writing as though he was saying, *“I am telling you from the beginning to now, there is a finished, complete work of Christ, and this work is the hope of redemption for all of humanity.”*

• **Luke is the Gospel for the Poor, the Lost and the Broken**

More stories are found in Luke about those who were poor, lost, and broken. Certainly the aspects of “lost” are covered in Luke 15: the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son, the prodigal. Frankly, in all of the stories Luke provides, he talks to us about a number of shady ladies and despicable men. He includes the outcasts and the overlooked. He lets us see that it wasn't the righteous, but the unrighteous Jesus came to seek and to save.

• **Luke is the Gospel for Women**

Interestingly enough, Luke makes very specific and detailed references to many of the women who were a part of the life and ministry of Jesus, including their names and referencing their roles. One of the most significant is found in Luke 8 when Luke writes about Mary Magdalene:

“And also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out” (Luke 8:2).

The last time I was in Israel, I visited an incredible museum in Magdala built around the depiction of women who were involved in the ministry of Jesus. One of my favorites was a picture where you see a

woman's hand reaching through the crowd and touching the hem of the garment of Jesus. But there were also frescoes and statues showing these women who were there and present. I love the fact that Luke made much of them.

- **Luke is the Gospel of Family Life and Relationships**

Nobody else gives us the back story of the family of Jesus like Luke does—Mary, Joseph, Jesus. Obviously, where do go in Scripture to read the Christmas story at Christmas? We know this story goes all the way back through the Bible, but when we hear the phrase, “Christmas story,” we think of Luke 2 because there, Luke gives us this in detail. But throughout the course of all that Luke writes, he tells us about Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and friendships and relationships with the disciples. Luke makes much of family life and relationships.

- **Luke is the Gospel of the Holy Spirit**

While other biblical writers give a cursory mention of the Holy Spirit, Luke made much of the spiritual, supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Luke references the Spirit at the birth of Christ, at the baptism of Christ, in the ministry of Christ, and at the resurrection of Christ because Luke wants to be sure we understand what happened was not something that was simply historical and intellectual, but something spiritual and supernatural. Luke wants us to understand that to encounter Jesus is not simply to go read some manual and say, “Well, I think this makes sense.” It's not just human reason or human logic; the reality of salvation is a supernatural work of God that transforms the human heart and life.

“Our salvation begins experientially with our being brought to a profound sense of need for a Savior. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings us to this realization of our need... The Holy Spirit can convince men of sin. We need not despair of anyone, no matter how indifferent they may appear, no matter how worldly, no matter how self-satisfied, no matter how irreligious. The Holy Spirit can convince men of sin... and bears witness directly to the individual heart concerning Jesus.” —R.A. Torrey

Some of you would give testimony to that. Some of you would stand here and say, “You know, I grew up around church, but I didn't see it. I didn't get it. And then there was a day when it was just like God opened my eyes and like God with His word just crushed my heart. Suddenly I realized I was a sinner and I needed a Savior, and I couldn't fix myself or change myself, and I gave my heart and my life to Jesus.”

I think this series is going to be a reminder for us to pray for the work of the Spirit in and through the life of our church, our homes, our families, and our connections so that ultimately, we would see people come to know and encounter Jesus—and people we never thought might do so.

3. Encounter the Savior

Obviously the end goal of this study is that we would encounter the Savior.

If I have one deep desire, one deep prayer for you, it is that you would know Jesus Christ personally. My desire for me and for us through this season of study is that we have a fresh encounter with Jesus.

Many of us could stand and say, "Yes, I've made a commitment to Christ. I've been saved. I've even been baptized, but I need a renewal of my life and a fresh encounter with Jesus—a renewed, transformative experience where I understand afresh and anew the work of Christ in my life.

Very quickly, as we begin this study, we're going to move toward the resurrection. Then we're going to go back to the beginning so that we've seen the end from the beginning. I'm going to have you confused the whole time trying to figure out, *"Where is he going this week in this study?"* But right after we have the announcement of the resurrection, we have this event that begins in Luke 24:13 and following where the Bible says,

"That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:13-16).

Jesus inquired, *"What's this conversation you're having with each other as you walk?"* Did you notice they were having a real intense conversation? They stood looking still and sad, and one of them said, *"Are you the only person on the planet that doesn't know what just happened in Jerusalem? We're talking about Jesus. We're talking about His crucifixion. We're trying to figure out what's happened. We've gotten word that some of the disciples are saying that He's alive, but we can't believe this."* (See Luke 24:13-26). They began to pour out all their angst, anxiety, and frustration to Jesus.

The Bible says that Jesus listened, and while they didn't know who He was, I love this:

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

This was the greatest single Bible conference in the history of the earth!—Jesus telling them about Himself. And then when Jesus left them later, Scripture says,

"They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'" (Luke 24:32).

Likewise, it's like the moment when we encounter Jesus and feel so alive, so energized, and so engaged that it's difficult to contain it. They were saying, *"Our encounter with Jesus resulted in something that literally transformed us."* And of course, the book of Acts would tell the rest of the story when a group of 12 uneducated disciples ultimately overcame the Roman Empire and changed the world with the message of Jesus Christ.

What a story! What a picture!

What I want more than anything else is not that we would leave here on Sunday with brimming heads of information—though I've given you a lot of information today—but I want us to leave here week after week with burning hearts because we have encountered Jesus!

Let me go back to my encounter with Hulk Hogan in 1992, because most of you are aware that on July 24, 2025, Hulk Hogan (post surgery) had a massive cardiac event and died. Over the last few weeks, if you've been looking at any media, you know all kinds of tributes have come in about Hulk from all over the world. This man was the myth, the legend, the man! He was all of it.

Hulk was a unique figure—an icon in American history. But for all the things that have been said about Hulk, the greatest thing I can tell you today is that in December 2023, Hulk Hogan was baptized at the First Baptist Church in Indian Rocks, Florida by a pastor, a young man I know. And that day, Hulk Hogan stood and confessed Jesus as his Savior. He said, "This total surrender and dedication to Jesus is the greatest day of my life!"

When Hulk went in that water, it was a body slam—bam! Water went out of the baptistry everywhere, because he's a big ole' man. But Hulk encountered Jesus. Although Hulk had a lot of shades and sorting in his life—all kinds of things that he did—he fits the profile exactly of the men and the women that responded to the gospel in Luke because Luke talked about how encountering Jesus changes everything.

Have you had a living encounter with the living Christ?

Do you have a Theophilus in your life? Someone you love and care about and want them to know the story of Jesus is credible? Let these be days when we write their name down, pray for them, and ask that God would move in their lives. Maybe invite them to come to church. Maybe let this be the time and the place where the encounter becomes a living encounter and changes their life forever. Nothing is greater! Nothing is more wonderful! Nothing in life can compare to encountering Jesus!

I grew up going to church. I knew the stories of the Bible. I became a chameleon as a young man, though. I knew how to be a good boy at church and I was a different person in another places. I did things I would be ashamed to stand here and tell you about today. But when I was 14 years old, there was a moment in my life when the Holy Spirit opened my eyes. I realized I was lost. I knew I needed to be saved. I wanted to come to Jesus. I wanted to know Jesus. That moment in time has changed everything. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, you too can know Jesus, and His power in your life.

Father, thank You for these moments together in what I know has been an informational introduction. But Lord, I pray today would just be a reminder to us that the facts of the gospel are what give us a reason to believe and have faith in the gospel. I pray this moment might be a moment of faith and response for some in this room, that someone today will call upon the name of Jesus, that someone

today, like these earlier, would be baptized, testifying that they know that only in Christ can they be saved. And Father, I pray that You would move in this place here and now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This is an edited version of a message preached from the pulpit of Warren Church, 3203 Washington Road, Augusta, GA 30907 on Sunday, August 10, 2025, by Dr. David H. McKinley.

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