



The Parable of the Sower

Summary and Goal

Don't we all want to be good soil? As Jesus said in verse 8, "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen!" What can we do to sow the Word more successfully? First, we must look inward and assess our own maturity, our own growth. How much is the Word producing in our own lives?

Main Passages

Luke 8:4-8

Session Outline

1. The Word (Luke 8:4-5a)
2. The World (Luke 8:5b-8,11-15)
3. The Heart (Luke 8:5b-8)

Theological Theme

In this parable, Jesus expounded upon the means God uses to save and sanctify people. He also explained the things in this life that prevent a soul from receiving the Word of God.

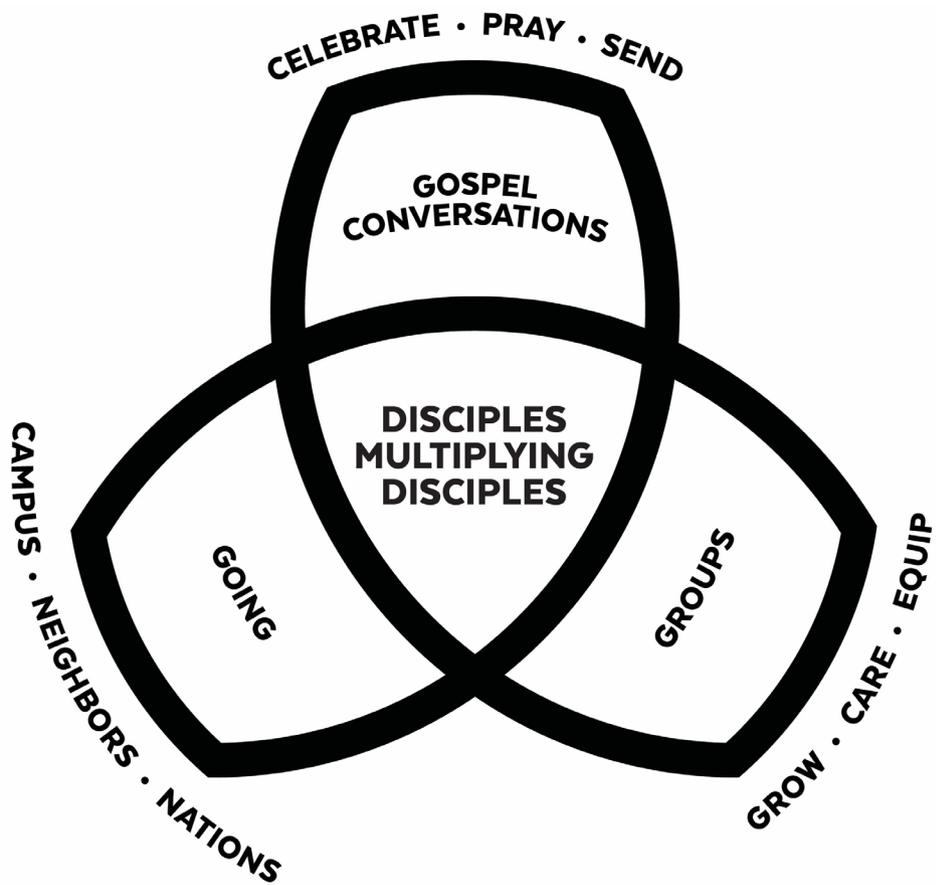
Christ Connection

In the context of this parable, Jesus was the sower of the seed. He proclaimed the Word of God to the people. But not only was He the messenger, He was also the message.

Missional Application

Jesus gave the ministry of proclaiming the Word of God to His disciples. All Christians have received the commission to testify of Christ to the world.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

For the Leader

Encourage members to meet during the week on Zoom as gender specific groups to discuss the application of this lesson in their lives. We suggest meeting in groups of three so everyone has an opportunity to talk.

1

Session Plan

The Parable of the Sower

For the Leader

If meeting by Zoom, have everyone display a house plant on their call for this session.

Encourage members to meet during the week on zoom as gender-specific meetings to discuss the application of this lesson in their lives. We suggest meeting in groups of three so everyone has an opportunity to talk.

Key statement: Being "good soil is within your reach."

Introduction

- When was a time simply hearing something was a blessing to you? Share as you are able.
- How has every follower of Jesus been blessed by simply receiving and hearing good news?

The Scriptures, God's Word, is the truth of God preserved for His creation. God has spoken specifically, understandably, and clearly. His words have been preserved for us in black and white, with ink on paper. This book is a great treasure to those who love and seek God. To the world it is foolishness, narrow-mindedness, and even destructive.

Today, we will consider the importance of the message that has been delivered to us by God—the Bible. We will also examine those things in the world that prevent its implantation in our hearts. Jesus Himself, in the form of a parable, taught His listeners the role and importance of the Word of God.

1. The Word (Luke 8:4-5a)

Luke introduced the parable of the sower with a summary statement of the public ministry of Jesus. He described Jesus' habit of traveling from one town and village to another. Luke said that Jesus' primary activity there was "telling the good news of the kingdom of God." According to Luke, the twelve disciples were with Him. In addition to these men, some women also followed. They had been healed of either sicknesses or evil spirits. Luke also indicated that some of the women were of means and helped to provide financially for the group.

- Who was this parable about? To what or whom do the elements correspond?
- What is significant about the seed? What is its role in the parable?

- Application: Do you look to God's Word primarily and regularly for your spiritual nourishment, or have you been led to believe you need something else? How is God speaking to you about this now?

2. The World (Luke 8:5b-8,11-15)

One of the most surprising elements of this parable is the detail with which Jesus described the obstacles to the reception of the Word of God in the human heart.

- What are the characteristics of the three bad soils?
- How have you experienced these threats in your life or witnessed them in the lives of others?
- Application: What things in your life push out the Word of God? What needs to change that you might be more open and attentive to receiving the Word of God? What is your part in this? What is God's part?

3. The Heart (Luke 8:5b-8)

The final aspect of the parable is the human heart. The different soils represent the hearts of men, women, and children. In each of the instances, except one, there are circumstances that make the soil unfit for growth. However, in all four circumstances the soil is insufficient. All four of the soils are lacking the Word of God and are in need of its effects.

- What evidence in the parable is there that the soil is in need of something? Why is it insufficient on its own?
- What is the difference between the last soil and the other three?
- Application: Have you received the Word of God with faith and repentance? How can you continue to receive and give your whole self over to Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

- When did Christ sow the Word in your heart? Who/what did He use to do it? How did your life change?
- How can we as a group seek to encourage one another in fighting the obstacles to our receiving the Word of God on a continual basis?
- As those who have received the seed of the Word, how are we called to respond by further sowing that Word in the world?



Expanded Session Content

The Parable of the Sower

For the Leader

If meeting by Zoom, have everyone display a house plant on their call for this session.

Encourage members to meet during the week on zoom as gender-specific meetings to discuss the application of this lesson in their lives. We suggest meeting in groups of three so everyone has an opportunity to talk.

Key statement: Being “good soil is within your reach.”

Introduction

On May 8, 1945, the Allies accepted Germany’s surrender, about a week after Adolf Hitler committed suicide. On that same day, Winston Churchill announced that victory had been achieved. As people huddled around radios heard the news, a great wave of relief and joy spread over Europe. What a blessing it must have been to hear and understand that news.

- When was a time simply hearing something was a blessing to you? Share as you are able.
- How has every follower of Jesus been blessed by simply receiving and hearing good news?

John wrote at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it, because the time is near” (Rev. 1:3). He believed that receiving the information contained within the book would bless the hearer. Why? Because it was the truth about the plans and purposes of God.

Information matters. The messages to which we avail ourselves have a tremendous impact on us. What we think about the world and what we believe about God is critically important. It is for this reason that blessing and curse accompanies what messages we internalize.

The Scriptures, God’s Word, is the truth of God preserved for His creation. God has spoken specifically, understandably, and clearly. His words have been preserved for us in black and white, with ink on paper. This book is a great treasure to those who love and seek God. To the world it is foolishness, narrow-mindedness, and even destructive.

Today, we will consider the importance of the message that has been delivered to us by God—the Bible. We will also examine those things in the world that prevent its implantation in our hearts. Jesus Himself, in the form of a parable, taught His listeners the role and importance of the Word of God.

Session Summary

The Old and New Testaments are the source documents of our faith. They are historical and verifiable. One may choose to believe that what is written in the Bible is not true, but no one can reasonably deny that what we have in the Bible are the very words that were penned by Matthew, Paul, John, and the like. Scholars agree upon the veracity and reliability of the Old and New Testament documents. We, of course, also believe that they are much more than ancient texts that provide insight into another epoch. Rather, we believe that the Scriptures are “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). We believe that “all of Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16).

When John introduced his Revelation he said, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (1:3). Though he was talking specifically about the Book of Revelation, his statement may rightly and accurately be applied to all of Scripture. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of Scripture, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

As Hebrews 4:12 states, the Scriptures do spiritual surgery on those who encounter it. It may be uncomfortable, or even painful, but it is always beneficial. This is why the psalmist intoned, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:1-2).

There is breakthrough power when we encounter the Word of God. There is no other book like it. It is the only book in the history of mankind whose author is God.

1. The Word (Luke 8:4-5a)

Luke introduced the parable of the sower with a summary statement of the public ministry of Jesus. He described Jesus’ habit of traveling from one town and village to another. Luke said that Jesus’ primary activity there was “telling the good news of the kingdom of God.” According to Luke, the twelve disciples were with Him. In addition to these men, some women also followed. They had been healed of either sicknesses or evil spirits. Luke also indicated that some of the women were of means and helped to provide financially for the group.

It is noteworthy that Luke did not say in his summary statement that Jesus went from village to village preaching and healing. Why didn't he summarize Jesus' work that way? Jesus certainly did go from village to village preaching, but He also healed many people and performed many miracles. So, why would Luke not include that? While true, this was incidental, not primary. Jesus had compassion on the sick and afflicted and would heal them, but His mission was to tell the people the truth about God's holiness and man's sinfulness, and then to offer Himself as a sacrifice to remedy the enmity between God and man.



Who was this parable about? To what or whom do the elements correspond?

Sowing Seed

In an agricultural society, everyone would have understood what happened when a sower went out into a field to sow his seed. At least one path ran through most fields, and much of the terrain in Israel was rocky under a thin layer of topsoil. Dropping seeds along such paths was futile. Many fields had thorn bushes along the perimeters. Seeds falling there had no chance to grow and survive until harvest time. Others, however, did fall on fertile soil and produced a bumper crop (a hundred times what was sown). Anyone who has ears to hear should listen is a challenge to carefully consider the story and its hidden meaning and practical implications (Rv 2:7).

Christians today often make the mistake of inserting themselves into the narrative of this parable at the wrong point. They are too quick to envision themselves as the hero of the story. This results in a theology and practice that is man-centered instead of Christ-centered. For example, many believers are quick to identify with the sower. Their motivation is noble for they desire to help others know the one true and living God by spreading the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, what did Christ mean when He told this parable? He explained it a few verses later (vv. 11-15), but He did not specifically identify who the sower was. This is because it was obvious to His disciples. Jesus is the Sower. He meant that He was like a sower who proclaimed the Word of God (recall Luke's introduction). As He explained, the seed is the Word of God, the differing obstacles correspond to real-life hindrances, and, finally, the ground is people. When a person reads this parable, their first thought should not be, *I am supposed to be sowing the seed*, but, *What kind of soil am I?* Of course, Christians may apply the work of Christ to their lives, but only after fully appreciating the original intent of the parable.



What is significant about the seed? What is its role in the parable?

The seed, as Jesus explained, is the Word of God. It is significant because it is pictured as the one thing that the soil needs. This, of course, connects back to Luke's introduction, which emphasized preaching as Jesus' ministry. If a Christian had any doubts about the importance and primacy of Scripture, this parable should clear that up.

Christians believe in the sufficiency of Scripture. This means that Scripture is sufficient to meet every need for the human soul. Scripture contains everything necessary for one's spiritual life. Scripture is comprehensive in that it fully addresses all spiritual needs of all people. This means that

if someone had no other Christian book, never attended a Christian conference, was cut off from all Christian music, and had no access to online Christian content but had access to the Scripture, then that person would have all that is needed to live a fully obedient, joyful, and vibrant Christian life.

- ❓ Application: Do you look to God's Word primarily and regularly for your spiritual nourishment, or have you been led to believe you need something else? How is God speaking to you about this now?

2. The World (Luke 8:5b-8,11-15)

One of the most surprising elements of this parable is the detail with which Jesus described the obstacles to the reception of the Word of God in the human heart.

- ❓ What are the characteristics of the three bad soils?

The path, the rock, and the thorns were employed by Christ to signify three distinct realities in the human experience that undermine the receiving of the Word of God. First, Jesus said, “The seed along the path are those who have heard and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved” (v. 12). This is surprising because Jesus indicated that the devil is actively working against the ministry of the Word. This should cause Christians to pray more fervently for the lost and to not grow weary in resisting the devil (Jas. 4:7).

Second, Jesus said, “And the seed on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy. Having no root, these believe for a while and fall away in a time of testing” (v. 13). The obstacle here is the “time of testing,” but the real problem is that there is “no root.” Had there been deep roots, the time of testing would have not caused the plant to wither. Third, Jesus explained, “As for the seed that fell among thorns, these are the ones who, when they have heard, go on their way and are choked with worries, riches, and pleasures of life, and produce no mature fruit” (v. 14). The worries, riches, and pleasures of life crowd out the Word of God and it does not grow.

- ❓ How have you experienced these threats in your life or witnessed them in the lives of others?

This parable applies directly to the current state of the world today. The work of Satan, times of testing, and the cares of the world are still the hindrances to the work of the Word in the human heart. This hasn't changed in two thousand years and it won't change until Christ returns.

This truth is helpful to Christians, and especially pastors as they seek to discern between good and bad, right and wrong. One key indicator for determining whether a thing is good is to determine whether it helps the Word of God to flourish in the life of an individual or if it pushes it out.

- ❓ Application: What things in your life push out the Word of God? What needs to change that you might be more open and attentive to receiving the Word of God? What is your part in this? What is God's part?

3. The Heart (Luke 8:5b-8)

The final aspect of the parable is the human heart. The different soils represent the hearts of men, women, and children. In each of the instances, except one, there are circumstances that make the soil unfit for growth. However, in all four circumstances the soil is insufficient. All four of the soils are lacking the Word of God and are in need of its effects.

- ❓ What evidence in the parable is there that the soil is in need of something? Why is it insufficient on its own?

We must be careful not to assume that the soil is an innocent bystander that is stymied by outside influences. The fact of the matter is that the human heart, like the soil, is lacking. In fact, it is absolutely impossible for soil to produce fruit without something acting upon it from the outside. There must be a seed planted. It is the same with the human heart. The Bible says that the human heart is “more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). This is because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). And further, “There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one” (Rom. 3:11-12).

- ❓ What is the difference between the last soil and the other three?

We may be tempted to say that the difference is that there aren't any obstacles that choke out the seedling. The reality is that all people face trials and temptations. Satan is active across the world. The difference is that hearts that have faith and repentance won't succumb to those obstacles, even though they are very much present. Those who hear the Word of God with faith and repentance (Mark 1:15) will flee from the devil, endure times of testing, and avoid the trap of the cares and pleasures of this world.

The other three soils don't receive the Word with genuine faith and repentance and are eventually ruled again by the world and the Devil.

- ❓ Application: Have you received the Word of God with faith and repentance? How can you continue to receive and give your whole self over to Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

This parable is about the work of Jesus Christ in the hearts of people. He sows the Word. The Word produces fruit in those who believe with repentance and is choked out in those who don't have true faith and repentance.

Those who are in Christ now are called to take up the work of Christ by proclaiming the good news of Christ to their family, friends, neighbors, and even to the nations. It is the Word of God that produces results. The work of the faithful sower is to keep sowing and trusting God to do the mysterious work of conviction, regeneration, and justification in the human soul.

- ❓ When did Christ sow the Word in your heart? Who/what did He use to do it? How did your life change?
- ❓ How can we as a group seek to encourage one another in fighting the obstacles to our receiving the Word of God on a continual basis?
- ❓ As those who have received the seed of the Word, how are we called to respond by further sowing that Word in the world?

Prayer of Response

Give thanks for the faithful work of the Sower, Jesus Christ. Ask His help to labor alongside Him, by His power, in the good work of sowing the seed of the Word of God. Pray for yourself and your fellow church members to be faithful in, first and foremost, receiving the Word of God with faith and repentance day in and day out, and also in seeking to plant the gospel seed in the lives of others.

Additional Resources

- *The Storytelling God* by Jared Wilson
- *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Luke* by Thabiti Anyabwile
- *Luke* by Darrell Bock

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Main Passages

- Luke 10:25-37

Session Outline

1. Godward Affections (Luke 10:25-33)
2. More Than a Feeling (Luke 10:34-35)
3. The Blazed Trail (Luke 10:36-37)

Memorize

Still other seed fell on good ground; when it grew up, it produced fruit: a hundred times what was sown.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”

- Luke 8:8

Daily Readings

- Monday - Luke 8:4-8
- Tuesday - Luke 8:11-15
- Wednesday - Luke 8:9-10
- Thursday - Matthew 13:1-9
- Friday - Matthew 13:11-17
- Saturday - Matthew 13:18-23

Historical Context of Luke

Purpose

The Gospel of Luke is a carefully researched (1:3), selective presentation of the person and life of Jesus Christ, designed to strengthen the faith of believers (1:3–4) and to challenge the misconceptions of unbelievers, especially those from a Greek background. Its portrait of Jesus is well balanced, skillfully emphasizing his divinity and perfect humanity.

Author

The author of the Third Gospel is not named. Considerable evidence points to Luke as its author. Much of that proof is found in the book of Acts, which identifies itself as a sequel to Luke (Ac 1:1–3). A major line of evidence has to do with the so-called “we” sections of the book (Ac 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–37; 28:1–16). Most of Acts is narrated in third-person plural (“they,” “them”), but some later sections having to do with the ministry of the apostle Paul unexpectedly shift to first-person plural (“we,” “us”). This indicates that the author had joined the apostle Paul for the events recorded in those passages. Since there are no “we” passages in the Gospel of Luke, that fits with the author stating that he used eyewitness testimony to the life of Jesus (1:2), indicating he was not such an eyewitness himself.

Since Luke wrote both the Third Gospel and the book of Acts (Ac 1:1–3), it is relevant to consider the dating of both books together. The events at the end of Acts occurred around AD 62–63. That is the earliest point at which Acts could have been written. If Acts was written in the early AD 60s from Rome, where Paul was imprisoned for two years (Ac 28:30), the Third Gospel could date from an earlier stage of that period of imprisonment. The other reasonable possibility is during Paul’s earlier two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (Ac 24:27). From that location, Luke would have been able to travel and interview the eyewitnesses to Jesus’s life and ministry who were still alive.

Setting

Traditionally, the Gospel of Luke is believed to have been written after both Matthew and Mark. Those who date Matthew and Mark in the AD 60s or 70s have tended to push the dating of Luke back to the AD 70s or 80s.

Special Features

The Gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. Focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, this Gospel is part one of a two-part history, the book of Acts being part two. Both were dedicated to “most honorable Theophilus” (Lk 1:3; Ac 1:1).

Extended Commentary

Luke 8:4-15

8:4-8. Crowds play an important role in Luke. Leading Jews may have rejected and crucified Jesus. Recognizing his power and the uniqueness of his teachings, the crowds flocked to him.

Jesus did not disappoint. He stirred their interest with a parable (see 4:23; 5:36; 6:39). The meaning of the parable has tested the abilities of the best Bible students. Perhaps we have tried too hard to find one central meaning rather than letting the parable open a vast new understanding of the nature of God's kingdom and Jesus' ministry. Others have so analyzed Palestinian farming techniques they have missed the simple, obvious truths of the parable. A few lines cannot hope to unravel the depth and breadth of its meaning. The story itself is a simple lesson from everyday life. Farmers sow seeds with different results. All the seeds thrown out by hand do not hit the target, nor is every seed left alone to enjoy its home in the warm soil. Much of the seed never germinates. But seed in good soil brings abundance.

The parable indicates that if we hear God's Word, believe it, and hold fast to it, we can be "good ground" in which the Word of God multiplies and bears fruit abundantly. Make sure you are "good ground."

8:9-15. Listen as they might, the disciples did not understand. At least they had the faith and trust to speak up and ask Jesus. Jesus singled them out. Only they were supposed to understand the parables. In them lay the secrets or mysteries of God's kingdom. Those who did not follow Jesus must suffer what God described as the result of Isaiah's ministry (Isa. 6:9). Hearing and seeing, people would not truly see and understand. Words and sights would never make sense to them and lead to changed lives.

So Jesus turned to the disciples to give them the inside knowledge prohibited for outsiders. His reference was far wider than a small Palestine farm. The reference was to God's redemptive work throughout his universe. The problem was seeing and hearing. God gives his Word, but people respond in different ways. Some hear, but immediately Satan robs them of the word, replacing it with his evil words. They miss the opportunity to hear and be saved. Some people hear with joy, excited at the new information and opportunity. But soon some other joy appears before the joy in God's Word can take root and grow. Tough times come, and joy alone is not enough to endure. God's Word must bring more than good feeling.

Others hear the Word but never go back to meditate on it and absorb it deep into their lives. They get caught up in the worries of daily life and the search for material success. Pleasure seeking overcomes eternal pursuits. They have no time for God's Word. They do not mature in God. Note that Jesus attended enough parties to be labeled a "party boy" by the Pharisees (7:34), and Jesus depended on women for material resources (8:3). Jesus does not call for hermits seeking refuge from life in the world. He does seek people who have a perspective on the world that puts the Word of God far above all worldly cares, interests, and activities.

Some seed hits the target. Good soil welcomes it, encourages its growth, hides it in their heart for times ahead, to persevere through testing, temptation, and the complexities of daily life. Mature disciples represent only a fraction of those who hear and initially respond to God's Word. Mature disciples represent those who listen for, meditate on, absorb, and follow God's Word along the twisting paths of life.¹

References

1. Butler, Trent C., and Max Anders. *Luke*. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.

Author Bio

Trent Butler (Luke)

Trent C. Butler is a freelance author and editor. He served ten years on the faculty of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, and for twenty-two years as editor and editorial director for Holman Bible Publishers and LifeWay. He wrote the Word Biblical Commentary volume on Joshua, the Layman's Bible Book Commentary on Isaiah, the Holman Old Testament Commentaries on Isaiah and Hosea through Micah, and the Holman New Testament Commentary on Luke. He served on the editorial Board of the Holman Christian Standard Bible, and edited the Holman Bible Dictionary. Dr. Butler has a Ph.D. in biblical studies and linguistics from Vanderbilt University, has done further study at Heidelberg and Zurich, and has participated in the excavation of Beersheba.

Max Anders (Luke)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Jared Wilson (The Storytelling God)

Jared C. Wilson is assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Spurgeon College, author in residence at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and general editor of *For the Church*. He is a popular author and conference speaker, and also blogs regularly at Gospel Driven Church, hosted by the Gospel Coalition. His books include *Gospel Wakefulness*; *Gospel Deep*; *The Pastor's Justification*; *The Storytelling God*; and *The Wonder-Working God*.

Thabiti Anyabwile (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Luke)

Thabiti M. Anyabwile (MS, North Carolina State University) serves as a pastor at Anacostia River Church in Washington, DC, and is the author of numerous books. He serves as a council member of the Gospel Coalition, is a lead writer for 9Marks Ministries, and regularly blogs at *The Front Porch* and *Pure Church*. He and his wife, Kristie, have three children.

Darrell Bock (Luke)

Darrell L. Bock (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is research professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. He is the author or editor of many books, including the two-volume commentary on Luke in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series, *Jesus according to Scripture*, and *Studying the Historical Jesus*.