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Witness of the Gospels
Final Project
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The following Bible Study may be used by adult individuals or small groups for either personal study or as part of a retreat setting (perhaps with a larger theme of “Who is Jesus?”). While anyone could use it, I had in mind those who want to develop a discipline of Bible study but are intimidated by the prospect. I wanted to provide a simple format modeling one way to study the Bible - read a section of Scripture, question and reflect on the reading, and apply it to daily living.

The details added on the last page are typical of information that could be found in an annotated or study Bible. The Greek “trivia” could be found in a good commentary (or BibleWorks7!)

In my last parish, “Women’s Ministry” was one of my areas of responsibility. I wrote this with the MOMS group (Make Our Mornings Special –a gathering of mothers of young children) in mind as well as a faithful member of the congregation who was, indeed, totally intimidated at reading and reflecting on Scripture for herself.

A Personal Bible Study Resource
Luke 7:11-17 (NRSV)
The Widow of Nain

Begin your time of Bible Study with a word of prayer. Ask God to keep your mind and heart open to the message of the Word you are reading today.

Read Luke 7:11-17.

Read these verses again but slow down your reading and expand your understanding by answering the questions below.

11 Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain,
Where is Nain? Find it on a map in your Bible

and his disciples

Who might this have included? Skim the chapters prior to this story, check the headings.

and a large crowd went with him.

Went with him from where? Where is Jesus coming from? Locate this city on a Bible map.

12 As he approached the gate of the town,

City gates were normally built as a defensive measure, but Nain was a small town and the gate was most likely for decorative purposes. Visualize the scene: Jesus, his disciples, and the crowd approaching the town as the funeral procession approaches from the other side to exit the town. Can you think of any symbolism this might represent?

a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son,

What did this mean for the mother?

and she was a widow;

What did this mean?

and with her was a large crowd from the town.

Why? What were they doing?

13 When the Lord saw her,

What does the word "Lord" mean to you?

What would this word mean if it was not capitalized?

Skim the chapters prior to this in Luke. What names for Jesus does Luke use?

he had compassion for her

What does "compassion" mean? Look it up in a dictionary and write down the definition.

and said to her, "Do not weep."

Why would Jesus tell the widow not to weep? Isn't that what people do at funerals?

14 Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still.

What is a bier? If you don't know, look the word up in a dictionary.

Would you touch a bier? Why is it especially significant that Jesus touched it?

And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!"

Look up 1 Kings 17:17-24. Read this story of Elijah reviving a widow's son.

What actions does Elijah take to revive the boy? How are Jesus' actions different? What is Luke trying to tell us about Jesus?

15 The dead man sat up and began to speak,

Wow! Imagine you were in the crowd that day. What would you be thinking?

and Jesus gave him to his mother.

What did this mean for the widow?

16 Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God,

Some other characters in Luke's Gospel had the same reaction. Think about the Christmas story. Check out Luke 2:8-20.

Put yourself in this story. If you had doubts about who Jesus was, what might you think now? Why?

saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!"

and "God has looked favorably on his people!"

Read Luke 1:67-79. Pay special attention to verses 68 and 78. Do you see a connection between Zachariah's words and the crowd's reaction? Who do the people think Jesus is?

17 This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

Well, I guess so! Who could have been an eyewitness to this event and *not* told everyone? Based on this story, what words would you use to describe who Jesus is?

Read the passage one more time. Ask yourself when or how you have been a recipient of God's compassion. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for the mercies you have received. Be intentional today in sharing God's mercy with someone you know.

Luke 7:11-17

Interesting Details and some Greek Trivia

The widow's situation: To be a widow and to have lost one's only son was to be in a very dire situation in 1st century Palestine. Her son would have been her last source of financial support as she would not have inherited her husband's property. After the mourners had gone home, she would be alone and penniless, easy prey for a swindler to take advantage of her.

Funeral practices in 1st century Palestine: Honoring the dead was important in Jewish culture. After the death of a person was certain, the dead body was prepared quickly for burial and removed from the city, usually before nightfall. Family members tore their clothing as a sign of mourning. The funeral procession included family members, neighbors, and even professional mourners. Early writings indicate that at a minimum two flutes and one wailing woman should be present at the processional. The family would mourn for 30 days.

Whenever the Greek term translated as "came forward" (see verse 14) is used of Jesus' coming to someone, it is followed by Jesus acting with authority. Check out Mark 1:31; Luke 9:42; Matthew 28:28.

The Greek word translated as "bier" in verse 14 refers to an open coffin, a plank on which the shrouded body was laid. Luke 7:14 is the only place in the New Testament which uses this word.

The Greek word for compassion literally translates as "to be moved as to one's bowels" (the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity)!