

# Luke

*Preparing Warriors*  
*Luke 5:33-35*

*With Study Questions*

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**Then they said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?” <sup>34</sup> And He said to them, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? <sup>35</sup> But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days” (Luke 5:33-35).**

## **Introduction**

I encountered a man giving a brief speech online recently. He was sharing a thought he had heard from a friend. His friend said,

**My grandfather walked ten miles to work every day. My father walked five. I’m driving a Cadillac. My son is in a Mercedes. My grandson will be in a Ferrari. But my great-grandson will be walking again. So, I asked him, why is that? He said, tough times create strong men. Strong men create easy times. Easy times create weak men. Weak men create tough times. He said, many will not understand, but you have to raise warriors.**

It is not difficult to see this pattern in Scripture. Prosperity, depravity, captivity, integrity, then back to prosperity, then back to depravity. We see it universally in the beauty of the garden followed by rebellion then death then faithfulness, then deliverance then more rebellion.

We see it in kingdoms with faithful David reaching the zenith of success of Israel, followed by Solomon, then the folly of his grandson, Rehoboam, then the divided kingdom, then captivity, then repentance, then deliverance.

This also happens in the lives of individuals. Whether it's Paul's thorn in the flesh or the humiliation of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:25-35) where he became like a beast of the field until he knew,

**that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will (Daniel 4:25).**

Perhaps you have seen this in your own life. Seasons of pain and difficulty producing deeper times of prayer and dependence upon that which is eternal; upon that which is infinitely firm. Hebrews puts it this way,

**He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." <sup>27</sup> Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. <sup>28</sup> Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:26-28).**

Lessons which aid in keeping our hearts attached to that which cannot be shaken can be deep and intense. Yet sometimes they are light and simple. We weren't poor in any global sense growing up, but my mom shopped at the Good Will out of necessity, not because it was chic or vintage. My first pair of track shoes in high school, I found in a trash can and had to tape them onto my feet.

This is not a 'woe is me' moment. I mention this because, to this day, I appreciate a new pair of shoes, perhaps, more than one raised in affluence. It is easy for me to be frugal. It was sort of baked in from a young age. This wasn't something my parents planned. It was by necessity. We simply didn't have the money. But for me to foster that same type of appreciation in my children requires discipline on my part. I can buy them new shoes with ease.

This is where things get tricky. As parents, we work to give our children an advantage that perhaps we didn't have, e.g., a decent pair of shoes. But it can easily be argued that more important than the shoes is the

virtue of gratitude in having them. Of course, I am merely speaking of shoes, but it can apply across the board to all of life and to the things of God as well; to faith and life.

What we will see in this brief passage is the wisdom of Christ when it comes to His followers in both joy and in difficulty. It is only three verses, but it is loaded in intrigue, deceit, wisdom and godly counsel.

**Then they said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink” (Luke 5:33)?**

### **An Ungodly Bond**

Luke records this encounter directly after the disciples of Christ (and Christ Himself) are criticized by the scribes and Pharisees for eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. Perhaps these accusers felt that this Jewish sect, which would eventually be called Christians (Acts 11:26), didn't realize just how sinful these sinners were. They don't fast enough, and they don't pray enough!

Notice the subtlety of the accusation (also note that the word 'devil' means accuser. An activity he views as a full-time job. Revelation 12:10). The question/accusation couples the followers of John the Baptist with the Pharisees, whom John referred to as a **“brood of vipers” (Luke 3:7; Matthew 3:7)**. The accusation is seeking to build an ungodly bond between the Pharisees and the disciples of John and build a wedge between the followers of John and the followers of Christ.

Like so many issues in the Scriptures and in the church, there is a splash of truth added to a bucket of destruction. Paul chastises the church at Corinth that they have schisms (1 Corinthians 1:10). But later in the same epistle he writes,

**For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you (1 Corinthians 11:19).**

Well, which is it? Are factions/schisms good or bad? In a general sense they are bad. First, that it **“must”** happen doesn't mean that those

causing them are justified in their behavior. It was “**necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead**” (Luke 24:46), but that didn’t justify the behavior of those who betrayed Him. All to say, there is a healthy and godly way to address sin and error. It usually requires patience, courage and effort (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:15).

Prior to any accusation, one may wish to take a deep breath. And by deep breath I mean prayer, study, an honest and thorough understanding of the supposed offense and more. Anything less than this and you may find yourself more aligned with the accuser than with Christ. We can be pretty certain that this question was nefarious in nature and not designed for the well-being of the recipients.

## **Praying and Fasting**

Also notice that the accusation involves praying and fasting. If you overhear a disagreement where someone is arguing for more praying and more fasting, you might be inclined to take sides with that person! But here they will soon be corrected by Jesus. Was Jesus against praying and fasting? Of course not!

Luke had just recorded that Jesus fasted for forty days (Luke 4:2) and in the next chapter he’ll record that Jesus prayed “**all night**” (Luke 6:12) prior to choosing His twelve apostles. Clearly, the devotional life of Jesus surpassed all. Yet, that did not halt the accusations. There is a great temptation to pursue piety and godly disciplines that they might be worn as a badge of honor and pride. Hendriksen observes the practice of the Pharisee,

**Their manner of fasting – looking glum, making their faces unsightly in order that everybody might see that they were fasting – was roundly condemned by Jesus (Matt. 6:16).<sup>1</sup>**

We must be careful that we don’t somehow use our own maturity and advancement in the faith as a cudgel against those who appear to be less advanced.

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<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Vol. 11, p. 308). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

There is a temptation here to get into a more detailed study on prayer and fasting, yet that does not seem to be the point of the passage. Enough to say, as we already did, that Jesus did both. Briefly, as far as fasting is concerned, it is not designed for physical health (although that may be a collateral benefit), but for spiritual warfare. Fasting is generally employed during sorrow or adversity.

There is no shortage of passages which teach of fasting. Sometimes for a single day (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 14:24; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35); sometimes for a week (1 Samuel 31:13); three weeks (Daniel 10:3); forty days (Exodus 34:2, 28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 18), etc. But as far as the law of the Old Testament was concerned, the only requirement for fasting was once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11). And this ended with the New Covenant-something Jesus will address in the next passage.

Even if we read the question/accusation with the best of intentions, we must be careful to avoid drawing the conclusion that disciplines that we find profitable for us must be followed by others. Calvin provides a valuable observation:

**This is followed by another evil arising out of fastidiousness and pride, when every man would willingly compel the whole world to copy his example. If anything pleases us, we forthwith desire to make it a law, that others may live according to our pleasure.<sup>2</sup>**

Years ago, I gave up television for a number of years. I found it beneficial for many reasons. I would advise giving up various types of social media or other distractions from time to time. But it would be an entirely different thing for me to seek to impose it upon others as if it is a law.

Jesus answers their accusation with a common metaphor used in Scripture where the relationship between God and man is compared to a marriage or a wedding.

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, p. 406). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

And He said to them, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? <sup>35</sup> But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days” (Luke 5:34, 35).

## A Time to Laugh, A Time to Mourn

It was a glorious, yet brief, time that Jesus walked with His disciples. Though there were certainly difficulties during His earthly ministry, the intense difficulty for His disciples would not happen for a time yet. He compares His earthly ministry to a wedding. No one introduces a fast at a wedding. It is a time of joy and feasting. Let us learn that there is...

**...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance (Ecclesiastes 3:4).**

It is insulting to God for our entire lives to be engulfed in sorrow and unhappiness. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” It is a sad indictment that the Scriptures must contain the command (many times) to be joyful. It was good for His followers to enjoy the season they were in. They were in the presence of Christ. It was a time to feast.

Yet Jesus did not end His answer with a mere justification for their time of joy. What He said next must have really gotten their attention. The **“bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.”** Both tradition and Scripture tells us that all (except perhaps one) of Jesus’ Apostles died a martyr’s death. In the good times, Jesus was preparing warriors.

There is a time to feast, but always be ready for difficulties. Life is like one big ride on the Titanic. It can be a beautiful thing. Good food. Good music. Good company. But there is an iceberg in the offing for every one of us and we should be familiar with the lifeboat manual. I would advise not waiting until the ship is actually sinking prior to engaging the text.

And if I may push the analogy a bit further. How much more will the passengers enjoy the cruise knowing the reliability of the boats which are designed to rescue us! And if I may go a bit more. How much richer the

excursion when we know that when the collision with the iceberg takes place (which is inevitable), that the instrumentality of the lifeboats brings us to a place far superior to anything found on the ship, to a place the manual calls paradise (Luke 23:43).

## Questions for Study

1. Discuss the pattern we see in Scripture and life of prosperity, depravity, captivity, integrity then prosperity. Have you seen this in your own life? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. In what way was the accusation against the disciples of Jesus subtle and nefarious? How should healthy, biblical confrontations take place (pages 4, 5)?
3. Was Jesus opposed to praying and fasting? Why were His followers not praying and fasting (pages 5, 6)?
4. How did Jesus prepare His followers to be warriors? How do we see this in our own lives (pages 6, 7)?