

## **Study of Luke\_ Reflective Journal** **Rebecca Howard**

### **Week 1 - Reflections**

Truth be told it is difficult to pick just one character from the birth narratives whom I want to exemplify. I found qualities in Mary, Simeon, and Anna that I wish to develop more fully as I pursue a more intimate relationship with God, with Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit. . .

Luke 2:19 reads, "BUT Mary **kept** all these things and **pondered** them in her heart." I've read this passage so many times, but never stopped to consider its application. Mary's response to all that had happened was quite opposite that of the shepherds and all whom they told about what the angels had said about Jesus. The shepherds "made known **abroad** the **saying** which was told them concerning this child." And, as for all those whom the shepherds told, they "**wondered** at those things which were told them." In this case I think Mary chose best, and we can learn from her example. Like the shepherds, when I receive **a saying (rhema)** from God, my first inclination is to tell everyone I know, shout it from the mountaintops if I could, not out of pride, but rather simply because I become so "caught up" in the revelation, so excited that I can't help but share so others might be "swept off their feet" as well. However, what I am learning is that more often than not, those whom I tell are left only to **wonder/admire (thaumazo)** and are not really changed by what I've told them and/or have no real desire to go deeper. God has been trying to teach me that there are some things that are meant for only me. When reading Luke 2, He stopped me on verse 19 and highlighted several words that I then looked up in Strong's concordance. To pull it all together. . . there are things He wants me to **keep (suntereo)**, treasured rhema that was meant only for me to hide in my heart and keep watch over, to guard against having its meaning or significance tarnished by others. According to Strong's Concordance the prefix **sun** denotes **union**. This made me consider the intimacy that is shared between man and wife; things shared in secret; things known only between husband and wife that both can acknowledge later with only a look. Things held in their hearts! Likewise some rhema is not meant to be shared with others, but is meant to be kept between myself and Jesus; rhema is gift meant to be held as precious, often given in secret prayer times or what I like to refer to as those "garden walks" when it is only the two of us.

Of Simeon, we learn in Luke 2:25 that he had been "**waiting** for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him." And, having been promised that he would see the Messiah before he died, verse 27 reads, "For this reason the Holy Spirit had moved him to be in the temple court at the very moment Jesus' parents entered." First, to **wait (prosdechomai)** as Simeon waited, means "**to await with confidence or patience**". I think the only reason Simeon had such great confidence that what he had been

promised would come to pass and the only reason he could await the fulfillment of the promise with such patience, is because he had spent so much time in prayer and in so doing had developed an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. He was so familiar with the Holy Spirit's voice that he was able to be moved precisely when and where he needed to be to receive the promise. Like Simeon, I desire to have a much closer relationship with the Holy Spirit, so that I do not miss anything God has for me. And, like Simeon, I need to learn how to wait upon the Lord, with confidence that He will fulfill His promises in His time. I need to learn to patiently wait, so that I don't get ahead of the Lord or try to make things happen by my own doing. For I know that God will not bless something that is not from Him, but is something gained in our own strength.

Finally, there is Anna who, "served God with fastings and **prayers** night and day." Her prayers were no ordinary prayers. They were **prayers (deesis) of supplication**. When I studied this use of the word prayer in Strong's Concordance, I found that it came from **deomai** meaning to "**bind oneself to**" and furthermore **deo** meaning "**knit or tie**". Regarding supplication, one commentary suggested that in our request or supplication, we must be wise to ask God for things that will truly enrich our lives, like wisdom, strength, health and love." This is the relationship that I would like to have with the Lord as I am praying. I want my heart to be so "knit together" with His that the desire of His heart becomes the desires of my heart. To go to God with everything in prayer, night and day. . .like Anna and furthermore, like our Lord Jesus.

## **Week 1 - Prayer**

Thank you, Lord, for Your Inspired Word. Thank you for these portrayals of Anna, Simeon and Mary in Luke's account of Your birth. Lord, my desire is to make my life a prayer to You; to live in their example and Yours. And, for my heart to be so knit together with Yours that what You desire becomes my desire, as well. That the ears of my heart would be so inclined to the promptings of the Holy Spirit that at the sound of Your voice I am moved as easily as You move the wind.

Lord, I praise You for all the times You have made streams of living water flow through the dry places of my life. Lord, bring streams of refreshing to my prayer life, now. Lord, I long to meet with You again in our Garden Place; to walk hand in hand; to be so close that I know Your thoughts and the next thing You will say. Lord, bind me to You with cords that cannot be broken.

Lord, the song of my heart again is this. . .  
Here I am Lord.  
Is it I Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night.  
I will go Lord, if you lead me,  
I will hold your people in my heart.

With all my heart,  
Rebekah

## **Our Song**

I come to the garden alone,  
while the dew is still on the roses,  
And the voice I hear falling on my ear,  
The Son of God discloses

And He walks with me and He talks with me,  
And He tells me I am his own;  
And the joy we share as we tarry there,  
None other has ever known.

He speaks, and the sound of his voice is so sweet  
The birds hush their singing  
And, the melody that He gives to me  
Within my heart is ringing

## ***Week 2 - Reflections***

Jesus, my Lord . . .

There has not been one moment of my life that I have not felt Your presence in some way. You visited me in my dreams from the time I was still a very young child;

Through my dreams You called me to meet with you in a garden,

Where we talked, we ran, we laughed and we danced;

In my dreams I sat with You near a stream, listening to the sound of the waters.

As I dreamed, I was free; free to just be a little girl,

Carefree, silly, and free to feel all the emotions that in the “real” world I often hid.

Those are cherished memories that have made me strong;

It is those memories that make the bond I share with you, my Jesus, unbreakable!

And, on those nights that I came to You, after having been hurt or made to fear, You were there then! You saw me; you saw the hurt I felt inside; you saw the tears I managed to hide from everyone else. You met me in the quiet of my room and as I closed my eyes and let silent tears fall, you held me in your arms and let me know you were there. It was in your arms alone that I felt safe, protected, and loved. You were my Shepherd and I was your lamb.

As I grew, you remained close, and kept careful watch over me. Even when I became interested in the things of this world, and stopped spending as much time with you in the quiet of the night and in the secret places of my heart, you never left me and never turned away from me when I returned. You were there with me as my faith ebbed and flowed, and remain with me even today as I continue to walk out my faith.

You were there with me when I fell in love and you were there when love was not reciprocated. You were there when I was used and taken advantage of, and you were there when I was rejected. You allowed me to feel all the emotions I needed to feel each time. You allowed me to grieve; you met me in my sorrow and my loss, but you did not let me stay there. In time you lifted my head and restored my joy. You reminded me that Your love was enough. Without those sorrows, I would not have known the fullness of your joy. It was during those times when you brought healing to my heart that I was most aware of your presence and your love for me.

You were there with me when I received the call letting me know that my brother had passed away, the greatest loss I've ever known. You were the air that I breathed when the Enemy would have this news suffocate me. You

were the beating of my heart when my heart was torn in two. You were my Peace when I screamed out in pain and denial and begged You to not let it be so. But, when I did not hear the answer I so desperately wanted to hear, You were the Answer I needed to hear. "I am here! You are not alone."

You were there with me at my father's bedside when it was the determined time that he should come Home to You. You gave me the courage to let him go; to give him permission to rest knowing that Mom and I would be okay. If I had my choice, I would have chosen that he would stay. I would have chosen his healing to be on this side of Heaven. But, You helped me see that Yours is the better way. That by calling Dad Home, You were showing him how much was Your love for him. He longed to see his son again; he missed him so much. He was really never the same after Mike died. As his health declined he was in so much pain and he was suffering so much. And, though he wanted to stay with us, his greatest desire in the end was to finally be with You, His Lord and Savior. There is no greater reward, and knowing that he is with You gives me great joy. And, I cling to the hope that I will see him again someday.

And, finally, You were there with me as I walked through the valley of death. You were my Defense against every arrow the Enemy shot at me. He would have me believe that no one would be there for me when I was in such great need. But, You! You sent streams of Your people to my bedside. You moved so many to pray for me that the Enemy never stood a chance of gaining the victory. For You had already defeated Death. You had already gained the Victory for me. When I could not lift my arms or heart in prayer because I was so weak so tired, and in so much pain, you moved your people to hold me up with their prayers. Through it all You showed me the depths of Your love in new ways. You taught me how to trust completely in You, to even trust you with my life. As it was when I was a child, you visited me in the night watches, and You sang over me. You sent Your angels to minister to me. Your Holy Spirit comforted me. You restored my health and canceled the power of death itself. You are my Healer! You are the Rewarder of my faith! You are my Life! You are my All in All! Your love for me conquers all!

You are my Beloved, and I am Yours!  
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## **Never Once** **By Matt Redman**

Standing on this mountaintop  
Looking just how far we've come  
Knowing that for every step  
You were with us

Kneeling on this battle ground  
Seeing just how much You've done  
Knowing every victory  
Was Your power in us

Scars and struggles on the way  
But with joy our hearts can say  
Yes, our hearts can say

Never once did we ever walk alone  
Never once did You leave us on our  
own  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful

Kneeling on this battle ground  
Seeing just how much You've done  
Knowing every victory  
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own  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful

Scars and struggles on the way  
But with joy our hearts can say  
Never once did we ever walk alone  
Carried by Your constant grace  
Held within Your perfect peace  
Never once, no, we never walk  
alone

Never once did we ever walk alone  
Never once did You leave us on our  
own  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful

Every step we are breathing in  
Your grace  
Evermore we'll be breathing out  
Your praise  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful  
You are faithful, God, You are  
faithful

## **Week 3 - Reflections**

### **1a. Luke 6:20-26\_Two Groups Being Addressed**

Just prior to this sermon, Jesus had just come down from the mountain where He had spent the night praying. In the morning He called His followers together and then chose Twelve to be Apostles. After this selection, Jesus came down from the mountain and stood on a level place with the Twelve and the rest of the disciples before a great multitude of people. It was to all three groups that Jesus spoke.

But, within these groups, there were two different audiences He was addressing. In Verses 20 through 23 Jesus is addressing those whose hearts had already been turned to Him. First, to those who were poor (in spirit), and knew they were in need of Jesus as Lord; those who acknowledge Him as their Savior and Messiah. Those who were humble and not pumped up with pride (Verse 20) Second, this first group hungered to know more about Jesus and learn from Him, so they could live right and imitate their Savior. (Verse 21) Third, those who had known much sorrow in life would find true joy in following Jesus. To those who knew what the Prophets had said this Beatitude would have reminded them of Isaiah 61:3, "To all who mourn in Israel, he will give them a crown of beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that they may be called trees of righteousness." (Verse 22) Finally, Jesus knew that this group who followed Him and called Him Lord, would be hated, ridiculed, and even cursed for His sake. Following Jesus comes with a great price, but those among His faithful followers would be rewarded in Heaven because they endured the persecution still rejoicing in Jesus. (Verse 23).

The second group that Jesus addressed was probably more directed to the multitudes that had come to listen but perhaps hadn't yet received the revelation of just who it was that was speaking. Perhaps, they had just come to be healed and nothing more. This second group has put their faith, trust and hope in the things of the world. They do not recognize Who it is that has given them every good thing. They are rich in material things which in turn

has made them prideful, so they don't even realize they actually need a Savior. They look good on the outside, but haven't asked God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts. And, see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24) I think of Matthew 19:24, ". . .it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Of course, this crowd would not know this verse since it hadn't been written yet! This group has a false sense of joy and does not know that true joy is found in relationship with the Son of God. All of the material things in which they have put their hope and identity can be taken away from them in an instant. They have not recognized that their true identity can be found in Christ.

**1b.** These verses which are promises bring great comfort to me. The first four verses are God's promises to me, that He cannot and will not break. That gives me hope and courage to stay in the fight. The last three verses are admonishments and reminders to always remember who it is that has provided every good thing in my life; where my Joy comes from, which is a Joy that the Enemy can never take from me. These verses remind me to remain humble and always give all glory to God and point others to the One who deserves all praise for anything good that they see in me.

### ***Week 3 - Reflections, cont'd***

**2a.** The people who are truly "listening" are those whose hearts are open. They are those who are really taken all that Jesus is saying to heart; who really desire to put into practice what He is telling them they ought to do. They are the ones who when they hear the words "forgive" and "enemies" in the same sentence will not dismiss this instruction as absurd and unreasonable. I believe Jesus draws attention to those who are listening because he wants the people to realize the importance of what He is saying, and to perhaps bring a little conviction to those who are not listening with their whole heart. It's Jesus' way of letting the people know that He sees their hearts and knows what they are thinking. He is acknowledging His true followers; those who are "all in!"

**2b.** Jesus gives the "listeners" several commandments about how they are to treat those who do them harm in some way. We are to show them love, repay them with kindness, and do good things for them despite how horribly they may have treated us or spoke of us. We should pray for those who have treated us poorly or meanly. We should not seek retribution or compensation when someone has stolen from us, but rather see it as a gift.

For all intense purposes, we are to treat our enemies as if though they were are friends and someone we loved.

**2c.** Enemies use words to cause harm; they speak ill things, try to tarnish our character, gossip about us behind our backs, put us down in order to feel good about themselves, try to turn others against us, and call us names. In action, enemies may become violent and strike out in anger. These are likely people who we associate with often . . . colleagues, acquaintances, fair-weathered friends, and even family. The last group of enemies are likely going to be strangers and people we run in to as we do life; someone who we do business with that we later find out is dishonest; and literally a criminal, a thief, a robber, etc. And, yes, the Lord has been dealing with me and has shown me recently a few who I have yet to forgive. Furthermore, He has shown me that in order for me to heal from the pain and harm that these individuals have caused and truly forgive them, I must pray for them. I've got the doing good to them down. But, I cannot really think of a single time that I've prayed for them.

**2d.** We are to respond with the perfect love of Christ; with forgiveness! We are to pray blessings over our enemies that it might go well with them. We are to guard our tongues and not "bite" back with spiteful words. We are not to become violent and take out our anger by fighting back or striking out. We are to give what we have to others even knowing that we will not see it returned. We are to treat others in the same manner that we would want them to treat us.

**2d. cont'd**

How might I respond to the people who God has highlighted recently? Well, funny thing. . .in recent weeks I said to those I confide in that one particular individual should not be expecting anything from me for Christmas. Anyone who knows me knows that I never withhold gifts just because I'm mad; I don't even really hold offenses for long. Do I get offended? Yes! I'm human! But, I've usually been pretty quick to forgive. But, as I mentioned previously, there are a few who have really hurt me and the offenses are piling up. God is showing me what it means to forgive "seventy times seven." But, before I could start to move forward, I had to realize that there was unforgiveness in my heart. God is restoring my "love walk" and take back ground. Of course, I'm not going to withhold Christmas gifts from this "enemy". Another thing I recently withheld is all communication; refusing to make any calls or reach out in any way. I actually withheld love. My heart was so hardened and so fast! But, the other day I actually did reach out and call. Though I was unable to speak with her, I've opened the lines of communication. I'll try again soon. And, most importantly, I have begun praying for these people.

**3a.** First off, the "you" Jesus is referring to here is again His true disciples and followers who acknowledge that He is the Son of God, the Messiah and

desire in their hearts to follow after His ways; those who are actually “listening” with their whole hearts and will apply what they have learned. The “even sinners” is referring to those in the crowd who were described in verses 24 through 26. The latter look good, and in these verses specifically are doing all the right things, but they are not doing those things out of a love for God. In this world we live in there are a lot of “good” people who do for others, give generously and maybe even do so without expecting anything in return, and they have big hearts and love people. But, many of those “good” people do these things from a place of pride, without acknowledging that it was God who gave them everything they have so that they can help others. The love they show is not the unconditional love of God. Many “good” people are trying to earn their salvation by good deeds rather than accepting the free gift of salvation and THEN doing good deeds BECAUSE of what God has done for them. Believers are to do these things, and go the extra distance!

3b. This leads me to the kind of love that Believers are to demonstrate. The nature of the love Jesus taught we should demonstrate is unconditional love or “agape” love. We are to go the extra distance - go out of our way to show love to not just friends but more importantly to our enemies. Jesus went out of His way to show love to tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers and those who the rest of Israel shunned and would not help; those whom they treated cruelly. It is only by God’s kind of love that hearts can be won for Christ. It is only by practicing unconditional love that the Kingdom of God will expand. God’s love conquers all!

3c. It actually wasn’t this week, but one morning maybe a couple weeks ago (I’d have to look through my prayer journal) God took me by surprise by revealing something that had been hidden/buried deep in my heart that needs to be uprooted. It will take some time. I don’t remember what exactly triggered this revelation, but I knew that God had examined my heart that morning and found a “wicked” way in me. Someone had recently done something that in retrospect really wasn’t anything I usually would have trouble forgiving, but what was revealed really didn’t have anything to do with that one “event”. God used this most recent offense to reveal the unforgiveness, anger, and even hatred that I was feeling towards this individual for a much greater deeper wound which had been inflicted over the course of years. The pain is real and it is deep; the roots of anger have grown so deep. God is dealing with me about this, but if I’m honest, I’m really not entirely sure that I want to let it go. Didn’t know that about myself. I usually find it so easy to forgive, but I realized that in part the reason for this ease is because the people that I have forgiven are either strangers or people I don’t have to spend a whole lot of time with. Forgetting is the key to forgiveness, and when you don’t see someone for a long time, it is easy to forget offenses and therefore forgive. But, this person is family (not by blood) who I see more frequently, and spend time with other

family every week who have been harmed by this individual's failings in very devastating, lasting ways. If this person had really just hurt me it would be so easy for me to forgive. But, the harm done in this case was against family members who are in my immediate family. The greatest harm was done to a family member who has passed away, so the harm cannot be undone. I find myself blaming this individual for the pain and suffering of the family member who died.

Now that this unforgiveness and anger has been revealed, I have asked God to help me be done with it, but it is going to take time. Like I said, the roots are deep! God is giving me a way. . .He has shown me that I need to pray for this person. I also know that I will have to lay this person at Jesus feet every time memories of the offenses surface. I know I will need to go quickly to Him in prayer, rather than letting the events replay in my head. I'm learning to forgive, "Seventy times seven!"

## ***Week 4 - Reflections***

Last November Pastor John had us start keeping a prayer journal where each day for a week, we were to write a letter addressed to our Heavenly Father about how we were feeling that day about things that happened that day or day before, about ourselves, others, our circumstances, wherever we found ourselves, etc. I used this assignment as a jump-start to drawing nearer to God and committing to spending time each morning in God's Presence, praying and waiting on Him. I believe we began this assignment back in November 2020 and I have continued it to this day. Our times together have been so rewarding!

For the purpose of this journal entry, I'll share a recent experience that occurred just yesterday. Really, I think my time with Him for the last several weeks has been leading up to my encounter with Him yesterday morning. Let me preface this account by saying that several weeks ago, I had prayed that He would reveal Himself to me in such a way that I would fall in love with Him (God) as deeply as I am in love with Jesus. In the days following this prayer, again something that I recorded in my prayer journal, He was faithful to start showing up in personal ways and making it clear that the WHO that I was actually hearing from and showing up, making His presence known was indeed, God my Father.

That brings me to yesterday morning. I typically start my time listening to music, and I just let Apple Music determine what plays. Of course, I have Christian music selected so that it is sure to suggest/play songs by Christian artists. By letting random songs just come up, I have often found that just the right song, I didn't even know I needed to hear comes up on the playlist. Seems random, but I've been doing this long enough I know that it is not. It is totally God! Yesterday was one of those powerful moments. Just the night before I was writing out my prayer for Week 2, giving an account of all the times in my life when Jesus remained with me, held me and lifted me with his love. God was revealing himself to me as I wrote that prayer, and then this morning He continued to minister to me. Just as I sat down at the table to eat breakfast and start my time with God, the song, "Alive" came on. It is a familiar song, but I haven't heard it in a couple years; we used to

sing it on the worship team at church when it was first released. Honestly, I almost skipped it to go to the next song, but then I heard the chorus. "Your love, your love, is never-ending. You lift me higher. You lift me higher!" Immediately, I thought of the prayer that I wrote the night before. Love lifting me higher was the thread that knit each verse of that prayer together. Through every circumstance God was there. I wrote that prayer thinking about Jesus; but yesterday morning God was revealing to me that He, of course, was there too.

After the song finished, I turned to the next chapter of Ephesians, where I had left off in my reading the previous morning. The verses highlighted to me in chapter 5 again had to do with the love of God "And continue to walk surrendered to the extravagant love of Christ, for he surrendered his life as a sacrifice for us. His great love for us was pleasing to God, like an aroma of adoration - a sweet healing fragrance in heaven and earth." As I stopped to meditate on these words, I found myself thinking back to the narrative I wrote about the "woman with the alabaster jar" who anointed Jesus. I thought, too, about the stanza of my prayer the night before where I shared an account of how Jesus was with me when I was walking through the valley of death and really learned the depth of what He did for me. But, God wanted me to see that He was there the whole time, too.

This morning God continued to give me my heart's desire which again was to learn to love Him as much as I loved Jesus. And, to do so, He is revealing Himself to me! This morning the first song from Apple music that played was a song I had never heard before. It was entitled, "Most" The words were powerful!

"The winds are changing, Your Spirit moving all around.  
Our eyes now open to mysteries of love.  
You are greater than every fear;  
You are stronger, and You are here.

The God of glory revealed to every heart and soul,  
In Christ our Savior, Redeemer of it all . . ."

The song continued with a few more verses and bridges, but then the worship leader paused and had the people in the LIVE audience consider Isaiah 41:13-14.

'For I am the LORD your God  
who takes hold of your right hand and says to you,  
To you "Do not fear, I will help you. Do not be afraid. . .  
For I myself will help you"  
Declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.'

**"For I myself will help you!"** Those words were highlighted and again I found myself in awe. Spending this time each morning with God, just listening for His voice, asking nothing except that He reveals Himself have been so powerful. My prayers have been more focused and I find myself praying the will of God. He is revealing the desires of His heart so that my desires line up with His own. I wouldn't trade these times with Him for anything else.

If anything I want to add something to my time. I found it interesting that for this week's assignment, you asked us to start our day by saying something like, "Good Morning God" and end our day by saying "Good night!" I have been watching, "The Chosen" a second time through for a couple weeks now, and what captivated me this time though was the prayer that Jesus and the disciples were praying just as they laid down for the night and as they rose the next morning. I have thought on these prayers and have decided to make them a part of my evening and morning routines. I'm looking forward to seeing how praying like this first thing and at the close of the night affects my sleep and my dreams. I think God will use them!

**The Evening Prayer:**

"Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe,  
Who brings sleep to my eyes, slumber to my eyelids. . .  
May I have a night of tranquil slumber.  
May I awaken to the light of a new day,  
That my eyes may behold the splendor of Your light."

**The Morning Prayer:**

"I thank you, Adonai, for the rest You have given me through the night,  
And for the breath that renews my body and spirit.  
May I renew my soul with faith in You, Source of all Healing.  
Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe,  
Who renews daily the work of creation."