

## CONTENTS

vi	Preface
viii	The Four Sevens Templates
xiii	Your Commitment
1	An Introduction to Luke
2	Days 1–7
17	Excursus: Journaling
20	Days 8–14
35	Excursus: Study Bibles, Niche Bibles, and Commentaries
38	Days 15–21
53	Excursus: Bible Translations
56	Days 21–28
71	And In Conclusion

## THE FOUR SEVENS TEMPLATES

Once we get into the twenty-eight devotions, you'll find that they follow a regular pattern. Something I selected randomly, pulling it out of the air? No. Believe it or not, I used some well-thought-out templates for constructing the devotions. And these are templates that I think you could benefit from understanding and turning into a habit.

I'm talking about templates for:

Bible Study

Prayer

Quiet Times

## A TEMPLATE FOR BIBLE STUDY

When one is studying a passage of Scripture, a basic but helpful pattern to follow is the threefold process of observation, interpretation, and application.

### Observation

This is pretty straightforward: observe what the passage is saying and describing.

VIII

First, read through a portion of Scripture and then go back and make some initial observations about it: *Who* are the characters? *What's* going on? *Where* is this taking place? Revisit the part of your brain that houses all of that literary criticism stuff your English teacher went on and on about while you doodled with your new four-color ballpoint pen. As a quick refresher, remember to ask yourself some basic who-what-when-where observational questions:

**WHO** is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters?

**WHAT** is the subject or event covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, event, or teaching?

**WHEN** do/will the events occur or did/will something happen to someone?

**WHERE** did or will this happen? Where was it said?

**WHY** is something being said or mentioned? Why would/will this happen? Why at that time and/or to this person/people?

HOW will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

I can never remember the “how,” because it rebelliously begins with an h instead of a w. Maybe it’s the same for you. If so, that’s okay. This is just a general template; it’s not meant to be a science or a straitjacket. Once you get a feel for some of these questions, try to keep an eye out for key words or phrases, repeated words, contrasts and comparisons, and terms of summary and conclusions (“so that,” “for this reason,” and so on).

## Interpretation

Often observation slides right into interpretation. But strictly speaking, observation refers to trying to understand what’s being said, while interpretation refers to understanding the overall meaning.

From what you’ve learned in your observation of the text, you are trying to discern a primary meaning of the passage—what the biblical author was seeking to communicate and what God was seeking to communicate through that biblical author. A particularly fruitful way to pull these things out of the passage is to ask questions such as “What sinful, broken, or fallen condition is being addressed or corrected by the passage?” “What is the deeper sin beneath the behavior?” and “What prompted the author to write this passage?” Keeping these questions in mind can help you uncover the primary meaning of the text.

## Application

So, how does the passage apply to you and to others? And what are some actions you need to take in order to apply God’s Word directly to your life?

ix

Let me suggest something here. I think our reflections tend to skip along the surface level of behavior or habits that need changing. This is okay, but often a more significant application resides at the level of our relating to God—our experiencing his grace or trusting in his character or promises. In light of this, I like to pray through certain questions that help me to apply what I’ve been reading to my walk with God.

God, what are you trying to say to me through this passage?

In what ways am I looking to find life in things besides you, Lord?

In what ways am I seeking to earn your favor rather than live by grace?

What do my actions suggest that I’m wrongly believing about your character, our relationship, and what you’ve said in your Word?

In what ways do we need to be more intimate in our relationship?

In what way is Jesus the answer to my problem?

I particularly like thinking about the last one: In what way does Jesus provide an answer or solution to my sin problem? It's hard to get into too much theological trouble with a question like this.

In the daily devotions that follow, I've tried to draw out some key observations for you. I'm going to map out a little of this process so you can get the hang of it and feel confident that at any time you want to just skip class (though I'm not condoning this) and go and have a quiet time, you'll be able to get some quality insight from the Word.

## A TEMPLATE FOR PRAYER

When I spend time reading Scripture, I often find that I have an intense desire to talk with God before I'm even finished reading the passage. I'll read about God's mercy and want to thank him for his mercy. Or I'll read something about God's power and glory and want to tell him again how awesome he is. Sometimes God's holiness comes through the passage and I'll feel the need to confess some sin that comes to my mind or some attitude I've had hidden in my heart that doesn't reflect his character.

By spending time in God's Word, we open ourselves up to his voice and he can speak to us directly—something he often does.

Prayer is a natural response to God's work in our life. A helpful model for me as I respond to God in prayer is the ACTS model: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Ⓐdoration: Telling God how great he is, why he's great (merciful, kind, and so on), and how much we love him for it.

Ⓒonfession: Acknowledging to God any known sin that is displeasing to him so that we can come to him unhindered, completely surrendered and cleansed.

Ⓓhanksgiving: Thanking God for his grace and forgiveness in our lives, and thanking him for all the things he's done for us and given to us.

Ⓔupplication: Asking God for things that we want.

Let me give you some reassurance about this last piece of the puzzle: supplication. Once your heart and mind are in alignment with God, it's okay to go ahead and ask him for

stuff—personal stuff, physical stuff, an A on your statistics paper, whatever. He wants you to come to him with everything. There’s nothing too big, nothing too small, so ask away, no matter how ridiculous you think it sounds. And the closer you grow to God through praying and reading Scripture, the better you will get at discerning his will for you, at knowing what he wants you to pray for. This is prayer that moves mountains.

Using this pattern of ACTS has helped me when I’ve not had the desire to pray. I’ve had to jump-start with ACTS when I’ve been confused, weary, sad, depressed, and outright weak. I just say to myself, Okay, adoration, right. Then I begin to pray: “God, you are greater than I am.” On many an occasion, ACTS has guided me into an intimate time with the Lord when an intimate time with the Lord seemed impossible.

## A TEMPLATE FOR QUIET TIMES

The template for our quiet times, then, is as simple as combining our templates for studying the Scripture and our ACTS template for prayer. But with one little nuance: sandwiching your Scripture reading between the prayer so that you’re praying before and after.

It looks like this:

### 1. TALK TO GOD

Adoration: “Lord, I praise you for ... (some quality of attribute of God).”

Confession: “Lord, forgive me for ... (for some sin or shortcoming).”

### 2. LISTEN TO GOD

Prayerfully *read* a passage. What does it say?

Prayerfully *reflect* on its meaning. What does it mean?

Prayerfully *apply* it to life. What does it mean for me?

### 3. TALK TO GOD

Thanksgiving: “Lord, I thank you for ... (some specific blessing).”

Supplication: “Lord, I ask you for ... (requests for yourself and others).”

**Talk to God, listen to God, and then talk to God again. It’s that easy.**

If you get used to this basic template and get used to meeting with God every day, you’ll be feeling closer to God, living in his grace, growing in holiness, maturing in your understanding of his Word, experiencing his forgiveness—rewarding stuff. But, remember, the key to all of this is creating the habit and being intentional. Make time each day when this routine can and will take place.

May it be so.  
MEETING WITH JESUS  
IN THE GOSPEL OF  
LUKE

DAY

01

### Talk to God

Take time to praise God for some quality of his, such as his grace or mercy or majesty. Then confess any sin or shortcoming you need forgiveness for.

### Listen to God

God does the impossible. Read Luke 1:1-38.

I want to say, here on day one of this month-long experiment, that by day twenty-eight, you, too, will be talking directly to angels. But that would be a lie and not a good way to start our month of quiet times. You probably wouldn't want to see an angel either, because when they appear, it's usually to convey a rather dangerous plan that you'll be in the center of, as was the case with Mary.

When the angel approaches Mary with news of God's plan and her role in that plan, she responds with the words "May it be so." It sounds like such a simple and obvious response, but what is not explicit in the passage are the implications of what Mary was saying yes to.

Mary was saying yes to public shame, the label of adulteress, the likelihood of her husband divorcing her, a possible future of raising a child by herself, a stigma that would remain upon her family for generations, and even the chance of being stoned to death—all the stuff that came with having a child out of wedlock sometime around AD 1. And whatever the consequences, they would only have been compounded by using the unbelievable alibi of a divine conception.

But in spite of all these factors, and knowing full well what she was inviting into her life, she said, "May it be so."

Mary sets the bar high for those of us who desire to say the same thing to God.

:: In your mind what would be the hardest thing God could ask you to do?  
Would you do it?

:: Why do you think the angel told her about Elizabeth, her cousin?

:: The passage states, "The power of the Most High will come upon you."  
What does this say about God?

:: How does it make you feel that the power of the Most High, his Holy Spirit, dwells in you?

:: When was the last time you said you would do something for God only to find yourself not following through on that later on? What might have been behind that decision not to follow through?

:: Mary was willing to trust God in his plan for her. Where do you have a hard time trusting God?

:: What areas of your life where you are doing well in trusting God?

:: What has God done in your life that you thought was impossible?

:: What are the nearly impossible things coming up in your life that you need to bring before the Lord?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

### Talk to God

Thank God for some specific insight or blessing he's given you. Afterward, pray through your requests for yourself and others, being sensitive to what God might want you to ask for.

In Excelsis Deo.  
MEETING WITH JESUS  
IN THE GOSPEL OF  
LUKE  
DAY

02

### Talk to God

Praise God for his goodness and faithfulness. Ask God to bring to mind any areas of sin that may be hindering your fellowship with him.

4

### Listen to God

Glory to God. Read Luke 2:1-20.

Shepherds minding their own business, quite removed from any rumors of a pregnant virgin, were the first ones told of the greatest news ever to be proclaimed. Go figure.

It seems that God's greatest pleasure is rooted in the birth of a Savior for all mankind. "Good news of great joy," the angel says, "because a Savior has been born for you." Why is this such "good news of great joy," anyway? Well, maybe it would help to consider the opposite: what would have been bad news of great sorrow?

A religious rulebook with another eight thousand commandments touching down in Bethlehem—that would have been bad news. By contrast, the good news (that which roused the shepherds out of their midnight grog) is that God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves by sending his Son to die for our sins. Good news is that salvation is by grace, a gift wrapped in a diaper, lying in a manger.

Shepherds care about few things. Food for the sheep, a safe place to lay their heads, and making sure all the flock are accounted and cared for. Perhaps God wanted to share the good news first with those who could understand some of the simple things that were on his own heart.

:: What do you think is so terrifying about the glory of the Lord? Do you ever think that it would be fearful to stand before God?

:: The angels proclaim that there is “peace on earth for men on whom God’s favor rests.” What in your life keeps you from believing that God’s favor rests on you?

:: The birth of Jesus is described as “good news” and “great joy.” Sometimes we lose that sense of joy and excitement over our Savior. What has stolen that joy from your heart?

:: What does this passage communicate to us about Jesus?

:: As you meditate on this passage, what is God moving you to confess, repent of, praise/thank him for, believe, or do?

### Talk to God

Thank God for all of his blessings, mercy, and grace expressed to you through the gospel. Then present him with any and all of your prayers, petitions, and requests.