

# A Disciple “Will Be Like His Teacher” (Luke 6:40): Making Disciples in the Gospel of Luke<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Using Luke 6:40 as a springboard, this paper examines how the formation of disciples occurs and how Luke’s moral logic works. Three aspects of formation are examined: the roles of imitation, community, and habit. For Luke’s moral vision, the study points out three key warrants: rewards, punishments, and imitation.*

**Keywords:** *Gospel of Luke, Discipleship, Imitation, Ethics, Warrants*

## Introduction

On the topic of discipleship in the Gospel of Luke, one regularly finds a description of the virtues and behaviors that characterize a disciple, such as prayer and the use of possessions.<sup>2</sup> This study, however, focuses on another aspect of discipleship, namely how formation occurs. To describe the process of formation in Luke, this study examines three variables: the roles of imitation, community, and habit.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this investigation, one gains not only an understanding of *how* dis-

1 This article was written as part of the Zagreb Biblical Institute research project: “The Concept of Discipleship Among Evangelical Churches in Croatia.”

2 See Fitzmyer 1981, 1:244-251; Johnson 2011, 96-105.

3 It is also worth considering other factors, such as the role of revelation, the Holy Spirit, and the heart.

ciples are made but also a glimpse into Luke's moral logic; that is, *why* disciples behave in kingdom ways (i.e., Luke's ethical warrants).

## 1. The Formation of a Disciple: How It Occurs

### 1.1. *The Role of Imitation*

The imitation of an exemplar is a standard way of thinking in the Greco-Roman world. For instance, Philo describes the Patriarchs as “living laws” (*Life of Abraham* 4), and Plutarch provides individuals for emulation and inspiration in his *Parallel Lives* (Meeks 1993, 190). When considering how formation occurs, Luke 6:40 is a pivotal text; it states, “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.” Why is this passage important? Luke's Gospel is primarily about its hero Jesus; the assumed rationale for so much content about Jesus is that followers should imitate what Jesus says and does, what Jesus commends and commands. This verse makes explicit that disciples require training, and the result of that training is being like their teacher.

Luke chooses paradigmatic passages at the beginning of Jesus' ministry to characterize Jesus' ministry, namely the temptations and the sermon at Nazareth; that is, the temptations describe *what Jesus' ministry is not* and the Nazareth sermon describes *what Jesus' ministry is*. So, with each of the three temptations in 4:1-13 Jesus rejects a ministry 1) that is self-directed by satisfying physical pleasure and comfort (i.e., turning stone to bread in 4:3); 2) that seeks power and esteem (i.e., “all this authority and their glory” in 4:6) by worshiping another other than God; and 3) that is a ministry of style (i.e., throwing himself from atop the temple in 4:9) versus sacrifice and service. Note that the Nazareth account (4:16-30) is *not* the first time Jesus has ministered:<sup>4</sup>

- Already, Jesus has been in Galilee (4:14).
- Already, “news about him went out through the whole countryside” (4:14; cf. v. 37).
- Already, Jesus “taught in their synagogues and was praised by all” (4:15; v. 31).

Luke focuses on and expands this account in Nazareth because it is paradigmatic of Luke's understanding of Jesus' ministry.

After receiving the scroll, Jesus “found”—showing his intent—the passage in Isaiah, which Jesus reads. The Isaiah quotation from chapters 61 and 58 shows the typical Lukan influence of the Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” In

4 For my comments on 4:16-30, I use an excerpt from my commentary: Cukrowski 2009, 795.

addition, Luke's interest in the dispossessed is evident in the four groups that are served:

- Poor (6:20; 7:22; 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 18:22; 21:3)
- Prisoners
- Blind (7:21-22; 14:13, 21; 18:35)
- Oppressed

Furthermore, we see the role of Jesus' example in the criterion that is given for the selection of a disciple to replace Judas: "So, one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22; NRSV).<sup>5</sup> That is, the successor to Judas must have accompanied Jesus in his ministry: "All the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us."

We find the rationale for imitation elsewhere in Luke as well. Luke 6:35-36 reads: "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."<sup>6</sup> What is Luke saying in this passage? To paraphrase: "If you love enemies, do good, and lend, then you are a child of the Most High." Why is one a child of God? Luke answers, "Because God is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Namely, when disciples behave in these ways, they are behaving like their father; they imitate God. And, just to summarize in as clear a way as possible, Luke concludes, "Be merciful as your Father is merciful."<sup>7</sup>

### *1.2. The Role of Community*<sup>8</sup>

The disciples are shaped by the experience of following Jesus. Early in his ministry, Jesus chose Twelve individuals from among his disciples (6:12-16; 8:1; 9:1, 12; 18:31; 22:3, 30, 47; cf. 5:1, 30, 33; 6:1). They receive intensive instruction (6:20;

5 On Jesus' example, see also Luke's small addition in 6:20-8:3 (teaching material) and his big addition in 9:51-18:14 (the travel narrative); notice also that 23 of the 33 parables in Luke occur in this section.

6 On the imitation of God, see Lev 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8 (holy); Matt 5:48; Eph 5:1.

7 Imitation of God is probably implicit in the description of God as a God of grace (1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78). See also the images of a gracious God in the following passages: 1) God as a vineyard owner (13:8; note the language of waiting a year); 2) God gives a banquet (14:17, 21, 23; note the three invitations); and 3) God is a grace-filled father (15:20-23; note the specific language that the father had compassion, as well as the outpouring of gracious acts and gifts). On grace, compare the Samaritan's example of mercy (10:33; "did mercy" in 10:37). See also the language "worthy to be called your son" in Luke 15:19, 21.

8 Talbert 1985, 71-73 mentions examples in Luke 8-11, 22, and 24, as well as some passages in Acts.

7:11; 8:9-10, 22; 9:14-16, 18-27; 40-45, 54; 10:23-24; 11:1; 12:1, 22; 16:1; 17:1, 22; 18:15, 31-34; 19:29; 20:45; 22:11, 14-38, 39-45; 24:36).<sup>9</sup> After Luke sends out the Twelve and the Seventy in Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-16, he gathers them for instruction (9:10; 10:17-24). We also hear about women who follow Jesus (8:1-3; 23:49, 55-56; 24:1-12, 22-24). From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus gathers a community of disciples and trains them through instruction and his example.

Furthermore, we see several places where the language of “following” characterizes the disciples of Jesus:

- 5:11 Simon, James, and John
- 5:27-28 Levi
- 9:23 Anyone: “Follow me.”
- 9:49 “Does not follow with us.”
- 9:57 A man: “I will follow wherever.”
- 9:59 To another, Jesus says, “Follow me.”
- 9:61 Another says, “I will follow you.”
- 14:27 Whoever: “Take the cross and come after me.”
- 18:22 To the rich ruler, Jesus says, “Come, follow me.”
- 18:28 Peter and others say, “We have ... followed you.”
- 18:43 Blind man: “Followed him.”

All these individuals who follow Jesus create a community, and there are expectations for the attitudes and actions of these individuals. Some of these expectations about behaviors are worth noting, as the sections below on Community Activities and Habit specify.

### 1.2.1. Community Activities

As a community, disciples are also shaped by interaction with one another. Functioning as a microcosm, Luke chapter 24 gives the readers a glimpse into this community of disciples; three actions stand out: reflection, remembering, and witness. These are factors that did and will create faithful disciples. Luke’s account is descriptive but not necessarily sequential or exhaustive. For reflection, Luke shows that the women are perplexed (24:4), Peter wonders (24:12), the two disciples talk and discuss what has happened (24:14-15, 17) and are amazed (24:22); the Eleven are troubled and question (24:38) and wonder (24:41). Part of being a disciple is faith seeking understanding, which goes back to the portrayal of Mary (1:24; 2:19, 51), which is an echo of Jacob’s reflection about Joseph (Gen 37:11).

Remembering is a second component of what disciples do together. Luke records that two men charge the women to remember that Jesus told them, “The

9 Other disciples also receive instruction (e.g., 6:17; 19:37-39).

Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day" (24:6-8). Later in the chapter, two disciples recite for Jesus the events that just occurred in Jerusalem (24:19-24), and in hindsight, they remember, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he spoke to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (24:32). Remembering is a communal action that forms disciples.

Witnessing to one another is a third part of what happens in the community of disciples. Luke describes how the women recount the events at the tomb to the Eleven and the rest (24:9), an account that is repeated later in the chapter (24:22-23). The two disciples narrate the events that just happened at Jerusalem (24:19-24), as well as their hopes about those events (24:21). The two disciples also tell the other disciples about "the things that happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (24:35). The Eleven and those with them relate how the Lord had risen and appeared to Simon (24:34). These three activities characterize the disciples and show some of the ways that faith is formed in the community of disciples.

### *1.3. The Role of Habit*

In the formation of disciples, the third main variable is the role of habit. Luke regularly relates that disciples are expected to do and hear (6:46-49; 8:15, 21; 10:37, 39; 11:28).<sup>10</sup> In the first century, this emphasis on habit is to be expected. Aristotle stated, "Habit makes character" (Meeks 1993, 7). What "habits" show up in Luke's narrative?

#### *1.3.1. Prayer*

One activity stands out as a regular habit in Luke. Using twelve verbs and three nouns, Luke mentions prayer over fifty times in his Gospel.<sup>11</sup> Prayer both begins and ends the gospel with its first mention in 1:10 and the last mention in the final verse of the Gospel (24:53). Luke shows Jesus as a person of prayer (22:39 "as usual"; assumed in 11:1; 24:53; cf. Acts 3:1). Jesus often withdraws for solitude

10 On obedience, see the following examples: Mary (1:38); Shepherds (2:15); Jesus (2:51); What should we do? (3:10, 12, 14); Peter, "At your word" (5:5); Levi, "Follow me" (5:27-28; cf. 5:11); Tree known by its fruit (6:44); Action flows from the heart (6:45); Hear and do (6:47; 8:15, 21; 11:28); Weightier matters: justice and love of God (11:42).

11 Twelve verbs: αἰτέω (5x), ἀνθομολογέομαι (1x), βοάω (1x), δέομαι (3x), ἐξομολογέομαι (1x), εὐλογέω (7x), εὐχαριστέω (3x), ζητέω (2x), κρούω (2x), λέγω (1x), προσεύχομαι (19x), φωνέω (1x). Three nouns: ἀναίδεια, ἡ (1x), δέησις, ἡ (3x), προσευχή, ἡ (3x). Other possibilities include the following words: αἰνέω, δοξάζω, χαίρω; αἶνος, δόξα, χάρα.

Passages on prayer: 1:10, 13, 64; 2:28, 37, 38; 3:21; 5:16, 33; 6:12 (2x), 28; 9:16, 18, 28, 29; 10:2, 21; 11:1 (2x), 2, 8, 9 (3x), 10 (3x), 11, 12, 13; 18:1, 7, 10, 11 (2x); 19:46; 20:47; 21:36; 22:17, 19, 32, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46; 23:34, 46; 24:30, 50, 51, 53.

and prayer (5:16; 9:18). Jesus retreats to mountains for prayer (6:12; 9:28; 22:39-42). Luke records at least four prayers of Jesus (10:21; 11:2-4; 22:42; 23:34). In fact, Jesus' last words should probably be also understood as a prayer (23:46).

Luke also shows Jesus praying at critical times in his life. Jesus prays at his baptism before he begins his ministry (3:21-22). Remarkably, Jesus spends all night in prayer before the selection of the twelve disciples (6:12). Not surprisingly, Jesus also prays before his death (22:39-42); earlier in the Gospel, he encourages disciples to pray for strength in times of trial (21:36). These examples show Jesus seeking God's wisdom and strength at difficult times in his life, modeling one role of prayer for disciples.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3.2. Attending Synagogue

With an explicit statement, Luke records that Jesus "went to the synagogue as was his custom" (4:16); this text indicates that Luke values the assembling together of God's people. The habit of attending the synagogue is mentioned with little comment, but numerous examples follow in the text (4:33, 38, 44; 6:6; 12:11; 13:10, 14; 21:12). This claim also occurs in Acts 17:1-2, where Paul "as was his custom" enters a synagogue and argues from the Scriptures.

### 1.3.3. Attending Passover

The habit of attending Passover is also mentioned with little comment: Jesus' "parents went to Jerusalem *every year at the feast of Passover*" (2:41, emphasis mine). Luke values the assembling together of God's people, whether it's for weekly worship in the synagogue or yearly celebrations of rituals like Passover. Worship and the celebration of God's acts form disciples in significant ways.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3.4. Reading/Obedying Scripture (Implied)

Several times, Luke records that individuals act following Scripture. One such example is found in a concentrated way in chapter 2, where Luke tells how Mary and Joseph 1) circumcise Jesus (2:21; cf. 1:59), 2) complete rites of purification (2:22; cf. Lev 12:2-4), 3) present Jesus to the Lord "according to the law of Moses" (2:22-23, 27; cf. Exod 13:2), 4) offer a sacrifice "according to what is said in the law

12 Jesus teaches about prayer in two separate blocks (11:1-13; 18:1-14). In these teachings, Luke provides a model prayer (11:1-4), stresses the importance of persistence in prayer (11:5-8; 18:1-8), describes God's desire to bless those who pray (11:9-13), and cautions about the right attitude one brings to prayer (18:9-14; 20:47). Jesus offers various kinds of prayer. He prays for himself, as seen in the examples above. But he also prays for Peter and the strengthening of the other disciples (22:31-34). Furthermore, Luke shows Jesus offering prayers of thanks to God for food (9:16; 22:19; 24:28-30) and for the progress of the kingdom (10:21-22). In all of these accounts, Luke stresses the importance of prayer for the life of one who follows Jesus.

13 Note also the role of worship/eucharist (24:31, 35b).

of the Lord" (2:24; cf. Lev 5:11; 12:8). Luke concludes this account with the summary statement, "When they had completed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their city Nazareth" (2:39), leaving no doubt about the importance of obedience to Scripture.

Luke shows the same importance of Scripture in the life of Jesus. Notably, in the temptation narrative, Jesus responds to the devil all three times with Scripture (4:4, 8, 12). Jesus reads and interprets Scripture in the synagogue in Nazareth (4:17-19), as well as gives two extended examples from Scripture (4:25-27). Luke's depiction of Jesus shows a life that has been saturated with the reading and interpretation of Scripture (e.g., 5:14; 7:22, 27; 8:10; 12:53; 13:27, 35; 18:20; 19:46; 20:17, 42-43; 21:27; 22:37; 23:30, 46).

With these four habits, Luke does not connect many specific virtues as products of these habits; rather, it seems that these habits function as the necessary conditions in which virtue can and should flourish. These are factors that did and will create faithful disciples.

## 2. Warrants

What warrants does Jesus mention for ethical behavior? With this question, I am classifying moral demands into the categories of norms and warrants. Norms are the dos and don'ts, the naming of virtues and vices. By "warrants," I mean the rationales for the behaviors: *why* one should do or avoid an action. Why is this important? An action/virtue might be the same for a pagan and a Christian, but the warrant(s) could be different.

Unsurprisingly, rewards and punishments are warrants found in the Gospel of Luke. For those who love enemies, do good, and lend, the "reward will be great (6:35b), a theme which one finds elsewhere as well (6:23). The theme of punishment occurs several times (12:46-47; 13:28; 16:23-24; 19:27; 20:16), sometimes in the language of woes (6:24-26 [4x]; 10:13 [2x]; 11:42-52 [6x]; 17:1; 22:22). Other times, even though the language varies, the message of judgment is clear:

- Judge (6:37; 11:19; 19:22)
- Condemn (11:31, 32)
- Destruction (6:49; 17:27, 29)
- Perish (13:3, 5)
- Wrath (3:7; 21:23)
- Fire (3:9, 16, 17; 12:49; 16:24; 17:29)
- Sulfur (17:29)
- Ax (3:9)
- Cut down (3:9)

- Weeping, gnashing of teeth (13:28)
- Thrown out/into the fire/into the sea/down (3:9; 13:28; 14:35; 21:6)
- Sea (17:2; 21:25)

Imitation is another warrant for Luke. There are some difficulties with a warrant to imitate Jesus. For instance, a disciple cannot always do the exact deeds that Jesus does, like raising the dead. Nevertheless, if a disciple asks, “Why should I be moral?” Luke’s likely answer would be (in part), “Be like your teacher Jesus. Listen to him and do what he taught.”<sup>14</sup> We have already seen above the importance of the role of the imitation of God (Luke 6:35c-36). The Greco-Roman context also had similar appeals to the imitation of the gods (Meeks 1993, 150).

## Conclusion

Through this study, we have seen how Luke depicts the formation of disciples; imitation, community, and habit are the primary means by which one becomes a disciple. Key to that formation is the insight that Luke 6:40 provides; this verse marks the role that Jesus’ example and instruction play in this formation. Finally, these reflections also offer some insight into Luke’s moral vision, especially answering the question “Why be moral?” with appeals to reward/punishment and the imitation of Jesus and God.

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14 One can see how, for example, the descriptions of Stephen (Acts 7) and Paul (Acts 20) mirror the life of Jesus. See Johnson 1992, 114-144, 359-368.



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**Učenik će biti „kao njegov učitelj“ (Lk 6,40):  
učeništvo u Lukinu evanđelju**

Sažetak

Koristeći Luku 6,40 kao odskočnu dasku, ovaj članak istražuje kako dolazi do oblikovanja učenika te kako funkcionira Lukina moralna logika. Istražuju se tri aspekta oblikovanja: uloga oponašanja, uloga zajednice i uloga navika. Ova studija ističe tri glavne osnove Lukine moralne vizije: nagrade, kazne i oponašanje.