

# Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



## **Luke 1:1-4** **“Making A Good Beginning”**

December 4, 2016  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551  
Church Website: [www.msumc1.org](http://www.msumc1.org)

## **“Following Christ From City Center!”**

**LUKE 1:1-4, "MAKING A GOOD BEGINNING"**

One Long Sentence, Sophisticated, Rhetorical Brevity (42 Words)

**I. 1:1-4 LUKE'S LITERARY AND RHETORICAL PREFACE TO HIS GOSPEL: VOLUME ONE.**

Engage A Wider World, 35 ft. Scroll, 32 ft. For Acts

**A. 1:1-2 Gospel Writers And Preachers Before Luke: 3 Parts.**

Mid-80's, 1<sup>st</sup> Century?

Protasis, *If* (vv.1-2), Canon Still Forming

1a	1	Inasmuch as (because) <b>many</b> have undertaken (lit. <i>set heir hands</i> )	<b>WHO?</b>	Level 3, Cause = Other Writers Incremental Innovation Within A Tradition
b	2	to compile (arrange) <i>a narrative</i> of the things ( <i>events</i> ) that have been accomplished (fulfilled) among <i>us</i> ,	<b>WHAT?</b>	Church = Center Of Activity: <i>Us</i> p.v. <i>By God</i> , Heb. 2:3-4, Salvation Story/Fulfilled Prophecy
Quality (4)				p.v. 4:21, 22:37, 24:44, Acts 1:16, 3:18
2a	3a	just as they were delivered to <i>us</i>	<b>WHY?</b>	Orally, 1 Cor. 15:3, 11:23, Heb. 2:3
b	b1	by those who from the beginning		Level 2, Acts 1:21-22, 10:37, 1 Group, 8:1-3
	b2	were <i>eyewitnesses</i>		<i>First Hand: Valued In Ancient Histories</i> , Acts 4:20
	b3	and became servants of <i>the Word (logos)</i> ,		<i>Committed</i> , Acts 1:8, 21-22, 6:2-4, 10:37, 11:15, 13:31-32
				<i>History: Luke Has Documents/Eye-Witnesses/Research</i>

**B. 1:3-4 Luke's Own Gospel Research And Writing In This Ongoing Tradition: 3 Parts.**

Apodosis, *Then* (vv.3-4) Level 4, Careful Historian, Larger Audience

3a	1'	it seemed good to <b>me</b> also,	<b>WHO?</b>	<i>Me also</i> (Luke), Acts 15:22-28 (HS!) No Critique Of Predecessors
Care (4)				Luke Proclaims Jesus/Truth
b	2'a	having investigated (followed)	Task: Up To Date	<b>WHAT?</b>
	b	all things	Scope: Sources/People	A Credible, Orderly Account// Acts 1:1
	c	accurately	Method: History	Acts 18:26, Erudition Leading To Insight!
	d	from the first	Extent: Origins	Historian, Not Necessarily Chronological (Acts 26:5)
c		to write <i>an orderly</i> (continuous) <i>account</i> for you, most excellent Theophilus,		Level 5, Acts 11:4, Elite Patron Goal = <i>Truth, Nothing But The Truth</i>
4	3'	that you may know the <u>certainty</u> concerning the matters ( <i>logoi</i> , things) about which you have been instructed.	<b>WHY?</b>	vs. Distortions, Acts 2:23, 11:4 25:26 v.2d, Your Confidence/Appropriation vs. Distortions/Suffering Acts 18:25, 1 Cor. 14:19 = Pastoral Theology

Oral/Written Materials, The Faith Must Be *Well Taught* = Catechesis

**7 Parts Of Ancient Historical/Biographical Prefaces**

**Parallels in Luke's Preface (1:1-4)**

1.	Author's predecessors, often with critical comments.	1.	"Inasmuch as many have undertaken" (no criticism)
2.	Subject matter of the work.	2.	"the things that have been fulfilled among us"
3.	Author's qualifications for writing.	3.	<u>a. Luke's Quality Sources:</u> "delivered us to/ by those who from the beginning/ were eyewitnesses/ and became ministers of the word"
	Eyewitnesses valued for ancient history		<u>b. Luke's Personal Care:</u> "having investigated/ all things/ accurately/ from the first"
4.	Statement of arrangement or table of contents.	4.	"an orderly account" (not necessarily chronological)
5.	Purpose of the writing.	5.	"that you may have certainty (know the truth)"
6.	Author's name.	6.*	Omitted. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Century tradition attributes gospel to Luke.
7.	Official addressee(s) and/or patron.	7.	"most excellent Theophilus" (lover of God)

**7 Layers of Testimony From Jesus To Today:**

**A Process In History, Superintended By The Holy Spirit In The Church**

6BC-30AD	Level 1:	<i>The person and works of Jesus</i> (historical, crucified, risen and ruling Lord)
	↓	
30-90A.D.?	Level 2:	<i>Eyewitnesses</i> (1 <sup>st</sup> generation: saw/oral reports: John's baptism through ascension) <i>who became ministers of the Word</i> (first disciples/apostles after Pentecost: proclaim)
	↓	
60-85A.D.?	Level 3:	<i>Other narratives</i> (Mark, Q, Matthew? various oral and written collections)
	↓	
80A.D.?	Level 4:	<i>Us</i> = Luke (2 <sup>nd</sup> generation ) who received and investigated the testimony of others
	↓	
80A.D. +	Level 5:	<i>Theophilus</i> and other contemporary readers of Luke-Acts (3 <sup>rd</sup> generation)
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1-4 <sup>th</sup> Century	Level 6:	Reception into the canon of the New Testament by the church: 4 Gospels.
	↓	
4 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> Century/Beyond	Level 7:	Christian history/tradition down to us; Jesus still rules his church by the Spirit today!

## A Brief Treatment Of Luke 1:1-4

Each of the four gospels begins in a different manner: Matthew with a genealogy (1:1-17), Mark with a brief announcement (1:1), Luke with a formal preface (1:1-4), John with a hymnic prologue (1:1-18). Luke's opening paragraph has attracted intense study since it deliberately parallels the prefaces of many ancient biographical and historical writings- a mark of sophistication! Luke knew his art and expected hearers to recognize the tradition in which he wrote. His second volume on a separate scroll, Acts, opens with a secondary preface (1:1-2) which asserts that the work of Jesus (now risen!) continues through his people in the Spirit. Jesus is the founder of a new movement with deep roots in an old faith- Judaism. Acts demonstrates how the founder continues among his followers through his heavenly rule and the Holy Spirit poured out upon them for a mission to Jews and Gentiles. Luke 1:1-4 is deliberately rhetorical with parallel structure. It is one long sentence in two parts: A. vv.1-2 (the *since*) and A' vv.3-4 (the *then*). Each has three components. The questions Who? What? and Why? are answered twice. A chart is helpful.

A. vv.1-2 Writers And Preachers Before Luke.	A' vv.3-4 Luke's Own Research, Writing, Purpose.
1. v.1a Who? <i>many</i>	1' v.3a Who? <i>me also</i>
2. v.1b What? <i>compile a narrative among us</i>	2' v.3b What? <i>write an orderly account most excellent Theophilus</i> (+ 4 statements of quality study)
3. v.2 Why? <i>eyewitnesses, servants</i> (+ 4 statements of quality sources) <i>the Word (logos)</i>	3' v.4 Why? <i>certainty about instruction</i>  <i>the matters (logoi)</i>

Note that Luke gives us five levels of early tradition: 1) Jesus himself- *the things fulfilled among us*- though he is not yet named; 2) the *eyewitnesses* of Jesus' ministry who became servants of this revelation- *the Word*; 3) compilers and writers before Luke- *the many*; 4) Luke's own composition- *it seemed good to me also*; 5) Theophilus. The trajectory continues in 6) Luke's being accepted into the canon as one of four gospels with Acts as the first church history, and 7) the use of Luke's works down to our day in reading and preaching, in art and music, in further church histories and Jesus research.

Luke highlights the quality of his sources in v.2a with a technical term for the cross-generational preservation of oral tradition (*delivered to us*.) The witnesses are early (*from the beginning*), of highest quality (*first hand*), and found a new vocation (*servants of the Word*). The disciples- some of whom became apostles- believed themselves to be recipients of divine revelation from God in Jesus and the Spirit that led to a new life. Fishermen became preachers! In a parallel set of four attributes in v.3b, Luke emphasizes the quality of his own work. It was 1) an investigation of 2) all relevant persons and materials, 3) carried out with attention to accuracy and 4) of proper scope from the beginning to the present.

Luke's deep convictions are that the God of Israel has now fulfilled the promises of Scripture in a way that offers salvation in Jesus to all peoples. He numbers himself among the preservers and faithful interpreters of these matters. Luke operates as a careful and self-conscious ancient historian and biographer. His preface is an artful invitation to read Volumes 1 and 2. The stated audience is Theophilus, likely also the patron. In a world where the Jesus story and its meaning was already being distorted, and where following Jesus involved suffering, new and old believers needed to maintain their confidence and courage in the midst of challenges within the ranks and from outside the walls. Read on!

## MAKING A GOOD BEGINNING

“... it seemed good to me also...”

The prompting for the third gospel!

L U K E 1 : 1 1 a

**T**he best way to get to know someone is to spend time with them. And if they are not longer available for conversation—say if they are dead, you immerse yourself in their literary remains. Lincoln scholars study his papers and speeches, review his wartime decisions and what others have written. Same with all the greats: Churchill and Shakespeare, Martin Luther King and King Henry VIII. And so I have done with Luke, author of the third gospel which—by early tradition—bears his name. I have twice preached his biography of Jesus from beginning to end, and one of those in your hearing. I’ve spent over two thousand hours observing his art of storytelling and the structure of each of his paragraphs with the aid of many scholars as my tutors.

So I am a serious student of Luke, and through him a modern follower and apprentice of Jesus, the one he wrote about with such style and care, convinced as he was from religious experience and careful research that Jesus was, as the angel said to the shepherds, “a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” And in that concentrated phrase three exalted titles are applied to Jesus of Nazareth: he is *Lord*, an Old Testament name for God and thus deity; he is the *Christ* or *Messiah*, a Jewish title for the king and deliverer to come, and so a fulfiller of Jewish history; and he is *Savior*, the Great Benefactor of all peoples. It’s quite a claim, since two of those—*Lord* and *Savior*—were also applied to the Emperor in Rome, and the third, *Messiah*, is a Jewish king, so it was a political and not just a religious claim from the beginning, and still is.

All three of the titles are political in the largest sense, and together they raise an important question: Who has the right to rule the world and the

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**Luke 1:1-4..... 5**

authority to set it right? And to that question Christians have a shocking, and to many an offensive answer, “Only a Jewish king. Only Jesus of Nazareth, and one day he will, so why not follow him now and be aligned with the deepest grain of history well ahead of time.” To come under his influence and under his rule is to be his follower, his friend, his project, that he might claim all you are and extend his influence through you and others.

Early tradition suggests Luke was born a Greek in Antioch and was a physician before being converted and joining Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Troas on Paul's second missionary journey in the early 50's of the first century. He was later shipwrecked with Paul on Malta and jailed with Paul in Rome, so he shared the dangers of mission. He went to Greece around the time of Paul's death and there wrote his two-volume history of Jesus and the early church.

His second volume, The Acts of the Apostles, is mostly about Paul's missionary journeys, and in four passages, Luke includes himself in the story, using the pronoun "we" to narrate various events. One second-century prologue to the Gospel of Luke claims: "Having neither wife nor child, [Luke] served the Lord without distraction. He fell asleep in Boeotia, at the age of 84, full of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> Constantine the Great transported Luke's bones to Constantinople in 356, where they were long preserved in the Church of the Apostles before being moved to Italy.<sup>2</sup> Our best guess is that his biography of Jesus was written in the early to mid-80's of the first century using Mark as his primary source, a second source he shared with Matthew,<sup>3</sup> and his own independent traditions and

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<sup>1</sup> "Paul and His Times," *Christian History*, No. 47.

<sup>2</sup> On the possibility his bones are extant, see [www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2015/05/27/The-Tomb-of-Luke-the-Evangelist.aspx#Article](http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2015/05/27/The-Tomb-of-Luke-the-Evangelist.aspx#Article); also Nicholas Wade, “Body of St. Luke Gains Credibility,” 10/16/01, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com); for the scientific paper, “Genetic characterization of the body attributed to the evangelist Luke,” [www.pnas.org/content/98/23/13460.full](http://www.pnas.org/content/98/23/13460.full).

<sup>3</sup> Known as *Q* from the German *Quelle*, source. This material is reconstructed from overlaps between Luke and Matthew they did not draw from Mark, a source common to both.

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stories.<sup>4</sup> Luke respected valid sources and the mutually correcting testimony of eyewitness, as must every serious because such writing is a massive sifting and selection process. And when you add to this his conviction that Jesus is God the Son come down to show us the Father in the power of the Spirit and that—having been judicially murdered— he is now raised from dead by the One who sent him, you see something of the weight of privilege and the call of sacred duty that fell to Luke in the last years of his life. Having seen so much and knowing so much of Jesus and the founders, it all came together in this project.

I wish we knew more about Luke and the details of his composition, and one day I plan to speak with him about it, whether or not I got his units and their patterns right. And if— already knowing the answer— he asks, “Phil, why did you do this?” there’s only one reply, “Same as you! I met the One you wrote about and wanted to know him more dearly, follow him more nearly, and tell others more clearly, day by day. And besides, I had to preach every Sunday!”<sup>5</sup>

What we know is that the scroll, made from sheets of papyrus paper stitched together at the long edges, was about thirty five feet long, and that estimate comes from counting all the letters in Luke and then dividing them by the average number that fit on a sheet of papyrus since they were written without spaces and punctuation in rows of letters from left to right in Greek. This was before wide spread use of the codex, the father of the modern book that unfolds in leaves attached to a spine rather than on spindles. We open a book and turn pages; they unrolled a scroll till they found the right place, since that was long before the chapter and verse divisions of our Bibles helped us with location.

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<sup>4</sup> Known as *L* or *Special Luke*.

<sup>5</sup> Modeled on the famous prayer, later a song in Godspell: “We thank you, Lord God, for all the benefits you have given us In your Son Jesus Christ, our most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, and for all the pains and insults he has borne for us; and we pray that, following the example of your saintly bishop Richard of Chichester, *we may see Christ more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly*; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen” (justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/139).

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**Luke 1:1-4..... 7**

And on the day it was completed, there was only one copy of this precious document, sponsored– in all likelihood– by a wealthy patron whose code name was *Theophilus*, meaning *lover of God*. It’s also likely Luke hired a trained scribe to purchase the expensive materials and to take his dictation in professional script. It was from that original autograph that copies were carefully made in Greek to be spread among the churches for reading in worship, later translated into Latin by Jerome in the year 405 and in the 1380's into English for the first time by John Wycliffe, long before the Reformation.<sup>6</sup> Some thought that people should hear of Jesus in their native tongue and not have to first learn a foreign language. And still it’s being translated so that every ethnic group and tongue may have it read in their mother tongue and have their hearts turned towards Jesus Christ. When we read the gospels with reverence, we should expect the Holy Spirit to shine light off the page and into our hearts and minds, which is why we’re asking you to read Luke a chapter a day in preparation for Christmas. If you read Luke, you will soon find someone reading you! It’s a very dangerous book.

I am fortunate that Dr. Charles Talbert, my Wake Forest professor, was a world class Lukan scholar, and that he infected me with his passion for what some have called the most beautiful book ever written. How many hospitals and churches are named St. Luke’s and found their inspiration in a physician who came to faith in Jesus. How many paintings of his Christmas scenes fill museums? How many angel choirs and shepherds have been sculpted? How many pieces of music? How many hymns? We Christians say this story was preserved by the work of the Holy Spirit that generations far distant might come to worship him as the shepherds did. That the church decided early on that these four portraits and no others– Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John– give us reliable access to the fullness of who Jesus is meant that the New Testament would open with four complementary portraits of one Savior, because God the Son come among us is too rich to be contained in any one telling all alone.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See “English Bible History,” [www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history](http://www.greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history).

<sup>7</sup> On the fourfold witness, see Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels And The One Gospel Of Jesus Christ* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000),

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**Luke 1:1-4..... 8**

So before he begins the story proper with the conception of John the Baptist, Luke pauses to inform us that his work is part of a larger movement of Christians telling the story of Jesus orally and then writing it down to preserve it in a more permanent form against distortions. In Jesus something had happened. The God of the Jews showed up at ground level to change everything and to send his people a fresh message after a long time of silence. It was an historical event, something in public and open to historical investigation and possible refutation. Not a myth, not a legend, not a private revelation but a thing done in the public eye with critics all around.

A man from a northern village, Nazareth in Galilee, came on the scene after years as a member of the local building trade, a worker in wood and stone. He spoke as no man spoke and had the most amazing effects on people, healing their sicknesses and sending their spiritual tormentors packing, and he did it day after day as if it was the new normal.<sup>8</sup> Historians agree that people flocked to Jesus because he was a healer and an exorcist who took time with whoever came to him, and they did, by the hundreds and thousands.<sup>9</sup> No magic words, no fees, no involved regimens, no confessions of sins required up front, just love doing good through surprising presence and power: the Father leading, the Son obeying, the Spirit empowering,<sup>10</sup> a Trinitarian operation giving people a preview of the kingdom of God, which is simply what life looks like when this God breaks into the old normal to rearrange expectations.

Jesus claimed to be the leading edge of God's new project; he called it *the*

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Chapter II, "The Authors of the Four Gospels..." 8-33.

<sup>8</sup> See Luke 4:31-44 for Luke's treatment of "a day in the life of Jesus."

<sup>9</sup> For an historical review, see Barry Blackburn, "The miracles of Jesus," in Graham H. Twelftree, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge, England: CUP, 2011), 113-130; Andrew Dauntou-Fear, *Healing in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), Chapter 1, "Jesus And His Contemporaries," 1-16.

<sup>10</sup> See John 5:19-30 for an operational account of how Jesus worked.

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*kingdom of God*, and by that he meant not a realm but a rule, not a place but a dynamic power. In his life the old promises given the biblical prophets were coming to a surprise fulfillment, and not at all in the way people expected. No stallions or battalions, no regalia or regiments, no blood spilt but his own, and that as a voluntary offering to display God’s suffering love on a roadway.

He was open to being interrupted, so earthy and true, so full of life, so blunt, so attractive and frightening at the same time because in his presence life was set right again. A true charismatic, a rock star for God, and wherever he showed up, good things happened to people high and low, and sometime toward the end of the first century, the last person he healed finally died.<sup>11</sup>

“I remember the day he and his band of ragamuffins walked into our little village,” a woman may have said, “it became *the before* and *the after* of our lives. It was the day we began to sing, ‘Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry. While on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.’<sup>12</sup> And he didn’t. He took time for each one, and no matter what came later, hope never died because we had seen the human face of God’s future. We were now in on the secret.”

Now to make sure what was going on was not forgotten, Jesus called a special insider group of twelve to watch and listen, to question and remember all he said and did. They were his memory bank, and they were first observers, then full trainees in God’s new thing as it rolled from village to village and back and forth to Jerusalem for the great national feasts.

Being with him was the new center of their lives. They— the men and the women— were his followers, and it was an education as no other; they lived and traveled with a Jesus who was a window into a new world. These are the *eyewitnesses* Luke speaks of in verse 2, and it was from them that Luke and

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<sup>11</sup> On the continuing role of eyewitnesses in the preservation of reliable information about Jesus, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Fanny Crosby, “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior,” *The U.M. Hymnal 1989*: 351.

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**Luke 1:1-4..... 10**

others of the second generation learned the details of a Jesus they'd already begun to follow because they met him first as the risen Lord. You don't have to know a lot to begin this new life, but once inside, your heart and mind will come alive in ways that will surprise you. You used to hate reading, but now Scripture is a personal love letter. You want to understand.

Luke and others of the second generation were converted by the message of Jesus' first followers. They then wanted to more about the Lord, which in the early days was easy because first hand reports were everywhere. This is the ground Luke covers in verses 1 and 2 of his preface, which any ancient reader or hearer would have admired as a first class piece of work.<sup>13</sup> One long sentence of forty-two Greek words broken into two parallel halves, each with three parts answering the questions Who? and What? and Why? It tells us that Luke was not only an educated man but one who understood the appeal of such a biography and made sure it had a proper introduction. And since less than twenty percent of the population were literate in the sense of reading and writing, it was- in the best sense of the word- an elite project, but with the knowledge it would be read in Christian gatherings, often with curious outsiders present. His thinking may have gone like this:

“God has done something to start setting things right again, and part of the work is an ongoing community centered in a Jesus who is alive with the life of God and rules over us. After years of being told orally by the eyewitnesses in preaching and teaching, in our day- beginning with Mark about two decades ago- it's begun to be written down as a connected story, and I am one of those doing the necessary literary work, and so I write on the first sheet of papyrus:

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<sup>13</sup> On the preface, see Charles Talbert, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 7-11; David Garland, *Luke: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan, 2011); Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 25-32; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), “The Preface to Luke’s Gospel,” 116-123.

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‘Inasmuch as many before me have set their quills to paper to arrange a story about the things accomplished among us, just as they were faithfully passed on to us by the ones who from the very start saw it all and eventually became ministers of this Word....’”

And if this is Luke looking back across nearly half a century back to the origins, in the second half of the preface in verses 3 and 4 he gives us the occasion, the research, and the purpose of his own edition of the Jesus story. When he says in verse 4 that “it seemed good to me also,” we take it as an indirect reference to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And so, if after following Jesus for a season, something “seems good” to you also, you may want to follow the hunch and see what happens. It’s where art and literature and music and new missions and new Christian institutions come from. The voice of God is not often a megaphone but a prompting to take a risk and follow a clue. Luke knew people as a doctor; he knew Jesus as Lord; he knew the apostles as friends, and along the way he’d read many biographies of the famous philosophers and leaders of his day. He was an educated man, and his life came to a convergence in his taking time to do the research and then the composition of about 17% of the New Testament in his two volumes, Luke and Acts, the biography of the founder followed by the story of the followers.

Poets learn to write poetry by reading good poets; Luke the biographer of Jesus learned his craft by reading bios and knowing what it meant to pour the story of Jesus into that common form.<sup>14</sup> And when he hired the scribe, and when he took out his hand copied scroll of Mark, and when he assembled his other papers and notes and began to lay out the large plan and dictate the content, God used it to change the world. And the process of “it seemed good to me also” is still going on wherever people take the God of Jesus seriously.

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<sup>14</sup> On the gospels as ancient Greco-Roman biographies see Richard Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); and, on the implications for reading, see Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), especially Chapter 5, “The Genre and Goals of the Gospels,” 221-289.

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**Luke 1:1-4..... 12**

Everyone has a call. What seems good to you as a follower? What do you see that needs to be done? Take courage and get started!

Credibility was important to Luke, which is why he followed his statement of intent, “it seemed good to me also,” with a brief review of his method in four careful phrases in verse 3, “having investigated/ all things/ accurately/ from the first...” Luke wanted to commend his biography to fair-minded people. And then, at the end of his preface, he reveals his purpose, “to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty concerning the matters about which you have been instructed.”

It’s a big fat lie! Faith is not blind trust; faith is trust based on reliable evidence and testimony. It cannot be forced; you cannot make yourself believe. It’s an inward assent to an invitation to trust the God who shows us his human face in Jesus. And it is the Holy Spirit who brokers the process, bringing the evidence across your path and then stirring your curiosity to consider it. One of the most reliable tools the Spirit uses is Luke’s Gospel since it gives us the whole life from conception through resurrection and ascension. Taking time to read and reflect on this ancient biography is one way to deepen your confidence and inward assurance of the central truths of our faith, the most important of which is that the Jesus you read about is not a dead figure of the past but incredibly alive and available to all who seek him.

NASCAR is not dangerous; sky diving and scuba diving are not dangerous; Seal Team 6 is not dangerous; what is dangerous is to discover that Luke and his friends were right, that this man Jesus is fully alive and wants my full attention. This is not a message of *try harder* or *be better* or *don’t cuss and drink as much as you used to*. Nothing so trivial as moral improvement. It is an invitation to a transforming relationship where he leads and we follow. It’s a call to be reconnected by Jesus to a very dangerous God who calls you to the lifelong risk of trust.

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