Unanswered Invitations to the Way of Jesus: Open-Ended Stories in Luke's Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51–19:44)

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As Michal Beth Dinkler notes, in Luke's Gospel "many parables are left open-ended."[1]

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), for example, ends with a question and a command (vv. 36–37). Whether the lawyer heeds these words, however, is uncertain. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11–32), the son and father are reunited, but the elder brother is last seen refusing to join the party, leaving uncertain whether he does (vv. 25–32). These parables appear only in Luke's Gospel. They are a sampling of several that give the Third Gospel a distinctive rhetorical punch.[2]

Luke's Gospel is much more than a good story. It is a story whose message not only instructs and informs, but also provokes and invites. It is a story that not only describes and passes on information, but also engages hearers and readers in a kind of dialogue about "the events that have been fulfilled among us" (1:1).

This essay highlights several aspects of specific parables in Luke's Gospel that make for open-ended conclusions.[3] The irresolution of these endings leaves open questions about how narrative characters may have responded. The rhetorical effect of these endings is open-ended invitations to hearers and readers, in Luke's day and in our own, to encounter the same parables and teachings as encouragements to respond by following Jesus on the way.

Defining open-endedness

Barbara Herrnstein Smith has observed: "The manner in which a [story] concludes, becomes, in effect, the last and frequently the most significant thing it says."[4] This is no less true for Luke's parables. Nor was it any less true for ancient literature. Many ancient rhetoricians speak of five ingredients for rhetorically crafted messages: the Introduction (*exordium),* background (*narratio),* argument claim (*propositio* and *partitio*), supporting proofs (*confirmatio* and/or *refutatio*), and conclusion or call to action (*peroratio*). Of relevance here is how ancient rhetoricians regarded the conclusion. The first-century rhetorician Quintilian calls it where "the audience must be moved": "At this point, if anywhere, it is permissible to open up all the sources of our eloquence."[5] Luke's parables addressed hearers in a world familiar with ancient rhetorical values. In such a world, conclusions invited the most significant rhetorical points to be made clear.

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Ancient hearers and readers also had working ideas of closure—what Noël Carroll calls a "feeling of finality."[6] By Aristotle's day (fourth century BCE), ideas about closure in Greek tragedy were in circulation (*Poetics* 7.3–7, 13–14). He defines closure primarily as resolution: the basic plot of every story has "both a conflict (*desis*) and a resolution (*lysis*)" (18.1). Where the conflict is not resolved, the ending is poor.[7] Conflict pertains not just to

1. Michal Beth Dinkler, *Silent Statements: Narrative Representations of Speech and Silence in the Gospel of Luke,* BZNW 191 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 151.

2. Notable examples are Luke 10:25–37; 12:16–21; 13:6–9; 14:7–24; 15:11–32; 18:1–14, 18–30. See also 5:33–39 and 19:11–27.

3. I am grateful to Nick Elder and Susanna Cantu Gregory for feedback on an earlier draft of this essay.

4. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968) 196.

5. *Orator's Education* 6.1.51–52. Translated from Quintilian, *The Orator's Education,* ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, LCL, 5 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001) 3.42. All translations of biblical and ancient works are my own, using texts from the Nestle-Aland 28th edition and the Loeb Classic Library series.

6. Carroll, "Narrative Closure," *Philosophical Studies* 135 (2007): 1–15, here 1.

7. Later Aristotle writes, "Many handle the conflict (*desis*)

When an ending recalls opening motifs (circularity), echoes earlier scenes (parallelism), fulfills expectations, or summarizes prior events, it refers meaningfully to what precedes and so draws things together at the end.

actual war, but also to story tensions, questions, and issues.[8] To this day, resolution is a predominate idea across cultures for what literary and rhetorical closure is.

Closer to Luke's day, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (late first century BCE) depicts closure in history writing this way: "In no way the least important aspect of proper arrangement is to have a beginning before which nothing at all has preceded, and at the end to draw together the action so that nothing else seems needed" (*On Thucydides,* 10.830). For Dionysius, ancient readers appreciated endings to stories that draw things together so that "nothing else seems needed." [9]

This may take place through forms of what I call "completion": when an ending recalls or fulfills earlier events. When an ending recalls opening motifs (circularity), echoes earlier scenes (parallelism), fulfills expectations, or summarizes prior events, it refers meaningfully to what precedes and so draws things together at the end. In these cases, connections to earlier events give the sense the story is completed.

Closure may also take place through what I call "terminal markers": closing scenes, statements, language, images, or signs that make an ending clear (for example, "The End" or "So the story finished"). Often straightforward and explicit, terminal markers make clear the story is at an end.[10]

Much more may be said about ancient notions of closure.[11] But for the purposes of Luke's parables, I suggest a notion of closure primarily defined as resolution: to conflict, to questions, and to relational tensions. When such things are left unresolved, a sense of openness results. In addition, aspects of completion (or incompletion) and terminal markers (or their absence) will be considered. While all stories end, not all give closure. Several of Luke's parables fall into the latter category.

Open-ended parables and teachings in Luke's Travel Narrative (9:51–19:44)

Luke is not the only Gospel with open-ended parables and stories. Still, Luke has an array of stories unique to his Gospel that are open-ended. Within the Third Gospel, the most distinctive examples appear during Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44), widely known as the Travel Narrative (or "Central Section").[12] At over 400 verses, this segment makes up over a third of the Gospel. Most of it is either distinctively Lukan or from a source shared by Matthew.[13] With almost no exception, Luke's Travel Narrative deviates from Mark's material and does not return until the penultimate chapter (Luke 18:15–34; cf. Mark 10:13–34).[14] In short, Luke's Travel Narrative blazes a distinctive trail in content and nature.

In Luke's Travel Narrative, Jesus teaches with a more intentional eye to the formation of disciples for future ministry.[15] However, that does not mean only disciples are addressed. Throughout the Travel Narrative, Jesus engages a variety of audiences (disciples, crowds, critics and adversaries), and sometimes the boundary markers around a story's audience are blurry.[16] As a result, throughout the Travel Narrative Jesus' teachings address not only committed followers, but also prospective followers standing at the fringes (or in opposition). All these audiences have opportunity to hear and respond to the parables and teachings of Jesus.

well, the resolution (*lysis*) badly, but regular proficiency in both is necessary" (18.3). Other ancient authors had similar understandings: Dionysius, *Pomp.* 3.769–771; *Thuc.* 12.837; Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata,* 80, 94.

8. For a notion of narrative closure based upon the answering or resolving of narrative questions, see Noël Carroll, "Narrative Closure."

9. See also *On Thucydides* 12.837, 16.847. Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE) also named this as a virtue for ancient writings: "In all historical writings, it is proper for authors to include in their books occurrences of states or rulers that are complete in themselves from beginning unto the end. … [O]ccurrences that have narrative continuity include a full report of events unto its completion" (16.1.1–2).

10. For example: closing lines ("So ended the war"), closing words ("The End" or "Amen"), authorial comments ("That's my story"), closing images (death), or closing scenes (a funeral). I borrow the language of "terminal markers" from Barbara Herrnstein Smith (*Poetic Closure*, 151–195).

11. For more on closure and openness among ancient literature and rhetoricians, see Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts Within Its Literary Environment,* WUNT 2.280 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 45–60.

12. The endpoint of the Travel Narrative is debated, depending on whether 19:29–44 is seen as part of the journey, part of the arrival in Jerusalem, or transitional. The prominence of "coming near" language (*engizō*, vv. 29, 37, 41) and the concluding function of Jesus's lament over Jerusalem (vv. 41–44; cf. 13:31–35) lead me to associate 19:29–44 with what precedes more than what follows. So also Michal Beth Dinkler, *Silent Statements*, 132–64; Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke,* ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 167, 282.

13. While Luke's Travel Narrative shares significant material with Matthew, Luke's order generally differs from Matthew's. For a list of passages shared by Luke and Matthew (but not Mark), see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX,* AB 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 77–79.

14. Even at this point, Luke only loosely follows Mark's outline. One exception to this is Luke 10:25–28, which uses Synoptic material very loosely to discuss the greatest/first commandment (cf. Mark 12:28–34).

15. Joseph Fitzmyer calls the Travel Narrative "a special device used by Luke for the further training of these Galilean witnesses. . . , a collection of teachings for the young missionary church." *Luke I–IX,* 826.

16. For example, in Luke 16:1 the disciples are identified as the audience, but by v. 14 it is clear the Pharisees are eavesdropping.

For the sake of structure, I will focus on three traits that distinguish many parables and interactions in Luke's Travel Narrative: unanswered invitations, unanswered questions, and unconcluded stories. For all three, representative texts will be discussed. All textual examples are either unique to Luke's Gospel or reflective of distinctive differences in Luke's version.

Unanswered invitations: Luke 9:57–62

Several parables and interactions in Luke's Travel Narrative end with a recommended course of action, without clarifying whether it is heeded. As a result, the exhortation stands unanswered, unresolved. For example, near the start of the Travel Narrative, a series of three interactions take place, each of which reflects this characteristic well:

> 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him,
> "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to
> him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests,
> but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59 To
> another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first
> let me go and bury my father." 60 And Jesus said to him,
> "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go
> and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Another said,
> "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to
> those at my home." 62 And Jesus said to him, "No one
> who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for
> the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57–61)

In each of the three cases (vv. 57–58, 59–60, 61–62), Jesus responds to a professed commitment with a word that refines and challenges.[17] And in each case, no clarity is offered whether the hearer responds favorably.

While Matthew has a form of the same passage, Luke introduces distinctive emphases to the interactions. First, Luke's version is longer. Matthew recounts two interactions (8:18–22), where Luke has a third, lengthening and making the collection more fulsome (9:61–62). Second, the dialogue partners are different. Matthew identifies them as a scribe and a disciple (10:19, 21).[18] Luke leaves all three dialogue partners unidentified, with no established relationship to Jesus. This makes them representative of general audiences, with identities and commitments to Jesus that are unclarified. Third, the passage's narrative location is very different. Matthew places the passage early in Jesus' ministry—before he has chosen disciples (10:1–4)—as a transitional piece among miracle stories (8:18). Luke places it later, near the outset of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem: "as they were going along the road" (9:57).

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At this stage, the passage becomes more representative of Jesus' teaching ministry on the way to Jerusalem.[19] Collectively, these distinctions make Luke's version fuller, more diverse in dialogue partners, and more representative of Jesus' invitation to discipleship in Luke's Gospel. As a representative scene, it portrays Jesus as persistently inviting all kinds of people to follow him in a decisive way. Whether they respond is unclear.

There is a pattern visible here: Jesus extends an explicit invitation to discipleship, to which no response is reported.[20] The lack of response stands in contrast with some scenes earlier in the Galilean ministry of Jesus (Luke 4:16–9:50), where invitations, miracle stories, and teaching scenes conclude with explicit commentary on how people respond.[21] In the Travel Narrative, invitations to the way of following Jesus appear in more numerous ways, with many unanswered by narrative characters. The lack of response gives these scenes what Joel Green calls "a certain timeless quality," inviting disciples then and now to come to terms with the demands of Jesus' invitation to discipleship.[22]

Unanswered questions: Luke 10:25–37

Another trait associated with open-ended parables and teachings in Luke's Gospel is the presence of questions. Ancient rhetoricians knew the value of questions for engaging audiences.[23] Luke's Gospel is rich with them: over 150.[24] Although they appear throughout

17. Each of Jesus' pithy responses may be identified as an aphorism or, in Greek rhetorical terms, a *chreia* (brief saying or anecdote). See Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 96–98; Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke,* Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015) 168; Joel B. Green, *Gospel of Luke,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 407.

18. Appropriately, the scribe also addresses Jesus as "teacher" (8:19).

19. Only 9:52–56—the story of a Samaritan village that refuses to receive Jesus—stand between 9:51 and 9:57–62.

20. Another good example of this is Luke 10:25–37 (see below). See also 9:23–27, 57–62; 12:16–21; 13:1–5 (also 6–9); 14:7–24, 34–35.

21. For example, when Jesus first calls disciples, the story ends: "'from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him" (5:10–11). See also Luke 5:17–26; 6:1–11; 7:1–10, 11–17, 18–30; 8:22–25, 26–39, 40–56; 9:37–43. Many of these are miracle stories, which invite responses less explicitly than verbal invitations to discipleship. Cf. 5:12–16, 27–39; 7:36–50; 8:4–15; 9:23–27.

22. Green, *Gospel of Luke,* 407. The comment is upon Luke 9:57–58, but with broader application.

23. See, for example, Quintilian, *Orator's Education,* 9.2.6–16.

24. I identify 153 questions in Luke's Gospel (cf. Douglas Estes's count of 154), with ten in Luke 1:1–4:13, forty in Jesus' Galilean ministry (Luke 4:14–9:50), 65 in the Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51–19:44), and thirty-seven in Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem (19:45–24:53): Luke 1:18, 43, 66; 2:48, 49(x2); 3:7, 10, 12, 14; 4:22, 34(x2), 36; 5:21(x2), 22–23, 30, 34; 6:2–4, 9, 32–34, 39(x2), 41, 42, 46; 7:19–20, 24–26,

Luke's Gospel—from the mouths of disciples, religious leaders, Jesus, and others—a shift happens in the Travel Narrative, not as much in the quantity of questions as in *who asks* them. In this section, Jesus poses the overwhelming majority of questions (88%).[25] In the rest of the narrative, he asks just over half (56%).[26]

In the Travel Narrative, Jesus takes greater initiative in posing questions to followers and prospective followers about matters of faith, following, and fidelity. On the flip side, the disciples, religious leaders, and others assume roles of greater silence, generating more opportunities to consider Jesus' questions and teaching.[27] In these correlating ways, the Travel Narrative features a Jesus who poses more questions than elsewhere, with audiences and dialogue partners more silent than elsewhere. As such, the journey to Jerusalem is a section marked by greater silence on the part of both committed and prospective followers.

Although questions can be mundane, Luke's Jesus often uses questions as a teaching strategy—as a provocation to consider things more deeply. Jesus' interaction with a lawyer or Torah expert in Luke 10:25–37 is a good example. The story is one of the densest in questions within Luke's Gospel. It begins with the Torah expert's question: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (10:25) Jesus responds with two questions of his own: "What is written in the Torah (Law)? What do you read there?" (v. 26) The expert answers: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (v. 27). To this, Jesus says simply: "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live" (v. 28).

But the expert is not satisfied. Wanting to "justify himself," he continues: "And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29). Jesus then tells a lengthy parable about a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who is beaten by robbers, bypassed by a priest and a Levite, and generously assisted by a Samaritan. Jesus follows this up with a question: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (v. 36). The Torah expert responds: "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus concludes the interaction: "Go and do likewise" (v. 37).

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Here we see several ways Jesus uses questions instructively. First, he responds to all the expert's questions (vv. 25, 29) with more questions (vv. 26, 36). This says something about Jesus' teaching approach. Instead of answering questions, he poses questions of his own to encourage digging and probing deeper.[28] In fact, the way he tells a parable in response to the expert's second question only suggests Jesus has more interest in deeper dialogue than straightforward answers.

Second, Jesus takes less interest in verbal answers than in faithful responses. To the expert's first answer, Jesus says "do this and you will live" (v. 28). To the expert's second answer, Jesus says "Go and do likewise" (v. 37).[29] Both of Jesus' affirmations focus more on lived responses than logical answers. He appears to be less interested in answering the expert's questions than in faithful responses to what is already known.

Finally, like other scenes in Luke's Gospel, this ends with an unanswered invitation. The Torah expert has presumably understood the parable sufficiently enough. He then hears the word: "Go and do likewise." Will he do it? Cues in the story do not clearly suggest one way or the other. As the interaction concludes, what remains unresolved are not answers to the expert's questions, but a lived response. Michal Beth Dinkler observes: "The gap in narration leaves the end untold, and in this way, invites the reader

31, 42, 44, 49; 8:25, 28, 30, 45; 9:9, 18, 20, 25, 41, 54; 10:15; 10:25, 26(x2), 29, 36, 40; 11:11–12, 18–19, 40; 12:6, 13, 17, 20, 25–26, 28*, 41–42, 51, 56–57; 13:2, 4, 7, 15–16, 18(x2), 20; 14:3, 5, 28, 31, 34; 15:4, 8; 16:2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12; 17:7–9, 17(x2), 18, 37; 18:7(x2), 8, 18–19, 24*, 26, 41; 19:22, 23, 31, 33; 20:2(x2), 3, 5, 13, 15, 17, 22, 24, 41, 44; 21:7; 22:9, 11, 27(x2), 35, 46, 48, 49, 52, 64, 70, 71; 23:3, 22, 31, 39, 40; 24:5, 17–19, 26, 32, 38, 41. Asterisked (*) instances indicate questions the NRSVue renders as statements. Estes, *Questions and Rhetoric in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 26.

25. Questions posed by Jesus: 10:15; 10:26(x2), 36; 11:11–12, 18–19, 40; 12:6, 13, 17, 20, 25–26, 28, 42, 51, 56–57; 13:2, 4, 7, 15–16, 18(x2), 20; 14:3, 5, 28, 31, 34; 15:4, 8; 16:2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12; 17:7–9, 17(x2), 18; 18:7(x2), 8, 19, 24, 41; 19:22, 23, 31, 33. Although some of these appear within parables, out of the mouths of parable characters, they are still spoken by Jesus with instructive intent. Questions posed in the Travel Narrative by others (all to Jesus): 9:54; 10:25, 29, 40; 12:41; 17:37; 18:18, 26.

26. Forty-nine out of 87 questions. Only the Galilean ministry of Jesus has a somewhat comparable percentage of questions posed by Jesus (27/40 = 67.5%), due in part to the Sermon on the Plain. On the significance of rhetorical questions in Luke 24, see Deborah Thompson Prince, "'Why Do You Seek the Living Among the Dead?' Rhetorical Questions in the Lukan Resurrection Narrative," *JBL* 135.1 (2016): 123–139.

27. On the silence exhibited by both the disciples and the religious leaders in the Travel Narrative, see Michal Beth Dinkler, *Silent Statements,* 141–164.

28. On Jesus' use of counter-questions in Luke as a teaching strategy, see Bart J. Koet, "Counter Questions in the Gospel of Luke: An Assessment," in *Asking Questions in Biblical Texts,* eds. Bart J. Koet and Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen, CBET 114 (Leuven: Peeters, 2022) 209–227.

29. J. Ian H. MacDonald identifies vv. 36–37 as the parable's *peroratio* (conclusion), which invites a lived response. McDonald, "Rhetorical Issue and Rhetorical Strategy in Luke 10.25–37 and Acts 10.1–11:18," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference,* ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, JSNTSS 90 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 59–73, here 67.

to step into the lawyer's role and decide for herself how she will respond to Jesus' story."[30]

Unconcluded stories: Luke 15:11–32 and 18:18–30

A third trait in some parables and stories in Luke's Travel Narrative is a general lack of terminal markers, generating a lack of significant closure. The stories often end in the middle of direct discourse, with little to no sign of departure by dialogue partners. As a result, the parables and stories seemingly end *in medias res* (in the middle of a thing). Endings as these give hearers and readers little assistance for transitioning back to the larger narrative.

A good example of this is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). While the first portion concludes with significant closure (vv. 11–24), the second portion does not (vv. 25–32). After the prodigal son's departure and return to his father in the first portion, the story shifts focus in the second to the elder son who refuses to join the party. When the father approaches, the elder son issues a lengthy complaint:

> Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him! (vv. 29–30)

In response, the father pleads: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (vv. 31–32). At this, the parable ends.

Did the elder son respond favorably? The parable does not say. The son's complaint outweighs the father's words in length. And if we are honest, the father's plea does not address the son's complaint as much as it doubles down on the need for him to embrace his brother's return. It is a stiff plea the father gives, by any reading. Luke has earlier made clear that the audience of this chapter's parables includes Pharisees and scribes, displeased at Jesus' welcome of "sinners" (15:1–2). The responses of both the elder son in the parable and the religious leaders outside it are related—and left open. The parable is open-ended, as is the invitation.[31]

Another example of this trait is the story of the Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18–30)—or "young man" in Mark and Matthew (Mark 10:17–31; Matt 19:16–30). Across the Synoptic Gospels, the story's initial interaction between Jesus and the man is similar enough: a man asks what he might do to secure an eternal inheritance; Jesus points him to the commandments; the man claims he has kept these; Jesus then issues a final challenge to "sell all you have and give to the poor" and "come follow me" (Luke 18:22).[32]

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This, the man is unable to do.

In Matthew and Mark, the man "went away grieving, for he had many possessions" (Mark 10:22; Matt 19:22). In these accounts, the man departs, giving the impression he has made his decision—and left. Jesus then teaches his disciples about the perils of riches (Mark 10:23; Matt 19:23). As far as these accounts go, the young man's story is effectively over.

But in Luke's version, the man does not depart. He simply "became sad, for he was very rich" (18:23). Even more, when Jesus begins teaching on riches, he does so "seeing him [the ruler]" (18:24). This makes the rich man a prime audience, along with the disciples, for Jesus' teaching. It gives the ruler opportunity to hear not only the call to sell his possessions, but also Jesus' teaching on the perils of riches (vv. 24–25), the reward for those who give them up (vv. 29–30), and the promise: "What is impossible for mortals is possible with God" (v. 27).

However, we do not hear how the rich ruler responds. Since he does not depart, the scene ends with him presumably still standing there, considering the challenge and invitation of Jesus. As far as we know, he never *stops* considering them. Aside from his sadness, his ultimate response is not clarified. The lack of clear closure to this scene and story means the possibility of answering Jesus' invitation positively continues to be held out as a possibility—to the rich ruler as well as others.

In the end, the rich ruler becomes a kind of representative character near the end of Luke's Travel Narrative: one of the many who encounters Jesus, hears his invitation to discipleship, and takes to heart the call and its cost. Like many others who encounter Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, the man's ultimate response is not clarified, leaving countless possibilities open. His example exemplifies the experiences of both narrative characters and readers and hearers of Luke's Gospel who similarly encounter Jesus and his disquieting invitation to discipleship on the way to Jerusalem.

Conclusion: Open invitations

Silence is powerful. Unresolved silence in story endings is provocative. And provocation lends itself to inviting hearers and readers to respond in some way.

Where words and events are expected, their absence is a form of silence. As Michal Beth Dinkler points out, silence "can be a

30. Dinkler, *Silent Statements,* 151–152.

31. Noted by Joel Green (*Gospel of Luke,* 587).

32. Luke alone includes "all" ("sell all you have,"18:22; cf. Mark 10:21; Matt 19:21).

particularly potent rhetorical tool."[33] Irresolution and silence in endings may yield various responses: shock, frustration, disappointment, displeasure, reflection, drawn conclusions, imagination, conviction, action, etc. All these responses bar hearers and readers from easily leaving the story behind.[34]

More than other Evangelists, Luke has an array of parables and stories that conclude with unresolved silence, leaving how and whether narrative characters respond unknown. Appearing especially in the Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51–19:44), many of these parables and stories focus on the call to follow Jesus, with endings that often focus on invitations related to discipleship. The silence of these endings is disquieting and unsettling. Experiencing this may provoke further reflection, not only on how narrative characters may respond, but also how hearers and readers today may respond for themselves. The prevalence of open-ended parables and stories in Luke's Gospel suggests they are part of Luke's larger literary goal, not only to tell the story accurately, but also to present the message of Jesus anew to audiences "today."[35]

In other words, Luke's Gospel and its stories do more than just tell past stories about others. They also engage hearers and readers of subsequent times and places in an interactive discourse, inviting them to consider the same claims of Jesus in their own day, as individuals and as communities. Just as people within the narrative hear the invitation of Jesus to discipleship, so do Luke's hearers and readers today.[36]

The lack of closure to parables and teachings of Jesus in Luke's Gospel is a disquieting experience, both for characters within and hearers and readers outside the narrative. This disquiet bars hearers from remaining comfortably unchanged, which reflects something of the nature of discipleship. According to Luke, following Jesus entails disruption, discomfort, and uprooting from old ways. Whatever following Jesus results in, things do not stay the same.

The disquieting experience of hearing the call of Jesus is not just disruptive to old ways; it is also an invitation to new ways. These invitations, furthermore, are not one-time events to singular decisions. They are open-ended invitations to "daily" discipleship (Luke 9:23). Throughout Luke and Acts, repentance, conversion, and discipleship are not singular decisions as much as they are ongoing, recurring, regular activities in which all kinds of people are invited to engage the call of Jesus and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

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In Luke's Gospel, we find a Jesus who poses probing questions, who extends widely the invitation to follow him, and whose invitation remains open-ended for hearers in his day and ours to answer. As we encounter this Jesus in Luke's Gospel, how might we respond?

33. Dinkler, *Silent Statements,* 11.

34. On silence as a rhetorical strategy in Luke-Acts, see Michal Beth Dinkler, *Silent Statements;* Kathy Reiko Maxwell, *Hearing Between the Lines: The Audience as Fellow-Worker in Luke-Acts and Its Literary Milieu,* LNTS 425 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 27–118.

35. On the prevalence of "today" language in relationship to salvation in Luke's Gospel, see Troftgruben, "Salvation 'Today' in Luke's Gospel," *CurTM* 45.4 (October 2018): 6–11.

36. On this, see also Joel Green, *Theology of the Gospel of Luke,* New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23–24, 35–37, 48–49.