

Narrative of Jesus’ Social Interactions in the Gospel of Luke as a Relational Foundation for an Inclusive Church

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		Abstract
Received:	07 July 2025	Pluralistic Indonesia often encounters challenges in cultivating harmonious social interaction. This article examines the narrative of Jesus Christ’s social interaction in the Gospel of Luke as a theological foundation for an inclusive and participatory Church. Employing a qualitative-descriptive method through literature study, the research explores how Jesus established relationships that transcended social, cultural, and religious boundaries. The focus is placed on His actions, values, and social responses toward various groups—including those marginalised. The findings reveal that Jesus’ social interactions embody divine hospitality and present a transformative relational model. The contemporary Church is thus called to reflect upon and embody these values within a pluralistic social context. This study affirms the relevance of Lukan theology in shaping a Church fellowship that responds to social challenges with inclusivity and dialogue.
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INTRODUCTION

Social interaction is a foundational element of a healthy and harmonious communal life. However, in reality, it often becomes a point of tension, leading to conflict, fragmentation, and social exclusion—even within the church itself. Throughout its history, the church has not been immune to division, rivalry, and the breakdown of relationships. Yet in His high priestly prayer (John 17:11), Jesus Christ underscores the necessity of unity among His followers—a unity that reflects the divine relationship between the Father and the Son. This unity is not mere uniformity but a relational bond that is inclusive, participatory, and rooted in love.

In today’s pluralistic and complex society, social relationships are increasingly fragmented by cultural, religious, and socio-economic divisions, as well as by technological developments that reshape patterns of human interaction. In this context, the narrative of Jesus’ social interactions in the Gospel of Luke becomes a relevant model for transformative relationality. Luke’s Gospel consistently portrays Jesus as one who engages across boundaries: He touches the sick, dialogues with the marginalized, dines with tax collectors, and affirms those who are socially excluded. These actions embody the hospitality of God and a divine solidarity grounded in compassion and justice.

The theological idea of *koinonia* or Christian fellowship cannot be separated from the social interactional model provided by Jesus. *Koinonia* represents a community of mutual support rooted in divine love and participation in the life of the Triune God (cf. Acts 2:42). An inclusive and participatory church is not merely a worship space but a relational community that receives, restores, and strengthens social bonds among believers.

This study addresses the following research question: *How can the narrative of Jesus' social interactions in the Gospel of Luke be understood as a theological foundation for the formation of an inclusive and participatory church in today's pluralistic society?* The focus of the research is on the forms of Jesus' social interactions, the subjects involved in these encounters, and the theological and practical implications for contemporary church life.

The aims of this study are threefold: (1) to identify and analyze the narratives of Jesus' social interactions in the Gospel of Luke; (2) to interpret the relational and theological values embedded within these narratives; and (3) to formulate their contribution toward the development of the church as an inclusive and participatory community. The study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach through library research, focusing on biblical texts and relevant theological literature.

The findings suggest that Jesus' social interactions reflect the relational dimension of God's mission, transcending social, religious, and cultural boundaries. These interactions affirm *koinonia* as the concrete expression of inclusive love. The novelty of this research lies in its narrative-theological approach to the Gospel of Luke, focusing specifically on Jesus' social interactions not merely as historical events but as a theological and practical foundation for building inclusive church communities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory-theological design, as developed within the qualitative research framework described by Creswell (2016). The primary focus lies in the narrative and thematic exploration of selected texts in the Gospel of Mark that portray the compassion of Christ, using exegetical methods and critical theological analysis. The main data source is the biblical text (the Gospel of Mark), analyzed through a historical-literary lens and biblical theology framework. Secondary data are drawn from contemporary theological literature, commentaries on the Gospel of Mark, and relevant peer-reviewed academic journals.

Data analysis follows an inductive process, beginning with the identification of compassion-related themes in the text and proceeding to connect them with Christological doctrines and the pastoral needs of today's church. The validity of the research is ensured through source triangulation and critical dialogue with scholarly works in theological literature. As a result, the study aims not only to produce a robust theological understanding of Christ's compassion in

Mark but also to offer practical implications for local church ministry in contemporary contexts.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jesus Christ: The Only Way and Goal of Salvation in Social Relations According to the Gospel of Luke

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' identity as the sole way and goal of salvation is not only proclaimed theologically but also embodied through concrete social interactions. Luke skillfully constructs a narrative that portrays Jesus' salvific work as deeply embedded in human experience, particularly through His engagement with the marginalized and socially excluded. Salvation, therefore, is not understood merely as a post-mortem reality but as a transformative life experience in the "here and now," shaping human beings to live in communion with God.

Jesus not only declares Himself as "the Son of Man [who] came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10), but also enacts this mission in interpersonal encounters rich in redemptive significance. His engagements with sinners, tax collectors, women, the sick, and foreigners demonstrate that the path of salvation is inherently relational. In each of these encounters, Jesus does not merely teach doctrinal truths; He invites individuals into an existential encounter with the saving presence of God.

In Luke's Gospel, salvation cannot be separated from relational response to the presence of Jesus. Zacchaeus, for example, after being welcomed by Jesus, undergoes a concrete transformation that touches on ethical and social dimensions (Luke 19:8–9). This illustrates that the recognition of Jesus as the way of salvation requires visible implications in social relationships. Salvation is not merely a private spiritual status but a communal reality shaped through renewed relations with both God and neighbor.

Furthermore, Luke's narrative emphasizes that Jesus is not only the way to salvation but also its ultimate goal. In the Emmaus narrative (Luke 24:13–35), Jesus reveals that all of Scripture culminates in Himself. This dialogue opens the spiritual eyes of the disciples—not just to the fact of the resurrection, but to the realization that Jesus is the very center of God's salvific purpose. Thus, the Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the exclusive way of salvation, because He enters human history, reshapes social structures, and reorients human life toward communion with God.

Consequently, Luke's testimony about Jesus cannot be separated from the relational context in which salvation is manifested and experienced. Jesus, who interacts empathetically with all groups of people, brings not only hope but also embodies the very path of salvation. In Him, God is personally present—bridging the alienation between humanity and God, and forming a new community grounded in grace, acceptance, and renewed life.

The Theological and Narrative Distinctives of the Gospel of Luke in Depicting Jesus' Social Interactions

The Gospel of Luke is narratively and theologically distinctive among the Synoptic Gospels, both in its structure, language, and vision. As the longest book in the New Testament, Luke offers a comprehensive account of Jesus' life—from His birth to His ascension. One of Luke's dominant features is his emphasis on the humanity of Jesus and the universality of salvation, especially for the socially marginalized such as the poor, women, children, and Gentiles (Guthrie, 2019; Pasaribu, 2019).

Luke is also unique as the only Gospel writer of non-Jewish origin with a Greco-Roman background, which gives his narrative a broader socio-cultural perspective. His introduction (Luke 1:1–4) reflects a Hellenistic historiographical style, providing a structured and ordered account of Jesus' ministry aimed at a diverse audience. The presentation of Jesus' life and ministry is therefore not merely biographical but bears strong theological significance—particularly in illustrating how the presence of Jesus brings both social and spiritual restoration.

A key contribution of Luke in emphasizing Jesus' social interactions is his intentional inclusion and empowerment of women. In a highly patriarchal first-century context, this is both socially and theologically radical. Luke highlights the role of women in the birth narratives (Mary and Elizabeth), in Jesus' ministry (Mary and Martha), among His followers (Luke 8:1–3), and as the first witnesses of the resurrection (Luke 24:1–10). These depictions affirm the inclusive posture of Jesus, breaking through traditional social barriers. Luke's representation challenges gender norms and advances the theological vision of dignity for all human beings.

Moreover, Luke's Gospel accentuates the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life and ministry. From the conception narrative (Luke 1:35) and Simeon's prophecy (Luke 2:25–27), to the anointing of Jesus' public mission (Luke 4:18–19), the Holy Spirit is a persistent presence. This pneumatological emphasis underlines that Jesus' social actions are not merely ethical or humanistic, but are the manifestation of the Spirit-led mission of God. Thus, Luke presents Jesus not only as a historical figure but as the divine envoy who, through the Spirit, fulfills the saving mission of God in socially transformative ways.

Finally, Luke's narrative structure, especially the so-called "Travel Narrative" (Luke 9:51–19:27), frames Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as more than a geographical movement—it is a theological journey marked by numerous social encounters. Along this path, Jesus meets Samaritans, tax collectors, the poor, and children, signifying that social interaction is not peripheral to His mission, but integral to the way of the cross. The Gospel thus portrays relationality as central to Jesus' identity and to the revelation of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus and Cross-Social Boundaries: A Narrative Analysis of Personal Encounters in Luke

The Gospel of Luke reveals that Jesus' social interactions consistently transcended cultural and social boundaries. Luke emphasizes Jesus' relationships with individuals typically avoided by society—Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:1–10), the sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50), the Samaritan outsider (Luke 10:30–

37), the criminal on the cross (Luke 23:39–43), and the prodigal son and his father (Luke 15:11–32). Through these compassionate encounters, Jesus embodies the face of a God who “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), while also presenting a divine solidarity that disrupts the exclusive norms of first-century Jewish society (Wonatorei et al., 2021, pp. 152–153).

Jesus’ engagement with the socially marginalized in Luke demonstrates that the mission of salvation is not limited by social structures, economic status, or ethnic identity. In a highly stratified Jewish world, Jesus’ choice to engage tax collectors, Samaritans, and sinful women was not merely a compassionate gesture, but a theological declaration that God’s love is radically boundary-breaking. Luke constructs these narratives intentionally, challenging the reader to recognize that salvation is not tied to ancestry or ritual law, but to faith response and openness to the work of God in Christ.

Jesus’ cross-boundary relationships are participatory rather than hierarchical. In each encounter, He allows the individual to contribute meaningfully—through dialogue, symbolic action, or confession of faith. The woman who anointed His feet with tears, Zacchaeus who pledged restitution, and the penitent thief all illustrate Jesus’ recognition of the other as a partner in a restoring relationship. These encounters reflect a model of relationality that respects agency, invites repentance, and opens the way for personal transformation.

Importantly, Jesus’ cross-boundary interactions in Luke are not merely acts of emotional comfort, but visible signs of the inbreaking Kingdom of God. Whether through healing, forgiveness, or social inclusion, these interactions manifest a new order—a foretaste of eschatological restoration. Thus, Jesus’ social engagement carries theological weight, embedding values of justice, liberation, and reconciliation.

Luke’s Gospel frames social relationships not as peripheral to Jesus’ ministry, but as central to the proclamation of the Gospel. Ministry to the excluded, the subversion of social hierarchies, and the affirmation of human dignity all flow from divine love that touches real life. In Luke’s narrative, Jesus’ personal encounters reshape broader social dynamics, offering a paradigm for the church’s social witness. Hence, Luke not only narrates individual relationships but also proposes a vision of community grounded in hospitality, acceptance, and transformative relationships.

Table Fellowship as a Symbol of Inclusive Relationship: A Socio-Cultural Study

One of the distinctive forms of Jesus’ social interaction in Luke’s Gospel is table fellowship. In the Greco-Roman world, shared meals were potent social practices that signified status, community boundaries, and inclusion. Luke presents several accounts of Jesus dining with diverse social groups—including Pharisees (Luke 7:36–50; 11:37–44), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10), and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). In these narratives, meals function not merely as background settings, but as symbolic acts of openness,

inclusion, and relational restoration. Socio-cultural studies of *symposia* traditions highlight the communal, egalitarian, and recognition-based dimensions of such meals (Neyrey, 2016, pp. 361–387; Crabbe, 2010, p. 25).

Jesus' table fellowship in Luke serves as a powerful critique of social exclusivity. He deliberately dines with those labeled “unclean” or “sinners” by religious society—actions that transcend mere hospitality and enter the realm of subversive theology. In the Kingdom of God, one’s social or moral background is secondary to their response to divine grace. These meals become symbolic actions that affirm radical acceptance and the unmerited generosity of God's love.

More than social rituals, meals in Luke become transformative spaces where lives are changed. The encounter with Zacchaeus illustrates this vividly: the shared meal leads to identity restoration and visible repentance. Jesus' presence at the table does not simply deepen social connection; it opens the space for ethical conversion and new commitment. Thus, table fellowship becomes a site where the Kingdom of God breaks into personal and communal life.

Additionally, Luke uses table fellowship to illustrate the formation of inclusive community. The meal table becomes a space where distinctions of status, wealth, or ethnicity are dissolved, replaced by the spirit of *koinonia*. It offers a prototype for the church as a space of relational grace—a community not of merit, but of mutual acceptance.

Ultimately, Luke’s meal stories elevate eating from a physical necessity to a theological symbol. The table becomes a sacred space—a meeting ground between the divine and the human—where teaching, healing, and revelation occur. In the contemporary church, table fellowship may serve as a tangible form of inclusive ministry, celebrating diversity and embodying unifying love. Thus, Luke’s meal narratives are not merely literary records; they function as theological vehicles for shaping the relational spirituality of the faith community.

Dialogue and Questioning as Transformative Interaction in Jesus’ Mission

The Gospel of Luke highlights Jesus’ use of dialogue and questioning as a core strategy of social interaction. This dialogical approach is evident in various episodes, such as the encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Rather than revealing His identity outright, Jesus begins with probing questions—diagnostic and reflective—guiding the disciples toward self-discovery and awakened faith (Wonatorei et al., 2021, pp. 154–156). Jesus’ dialogical communication illustrates that social interaction is not unilateral, but open, participatory, and existentially engaging.

Jesus' method treats listeners as active subjects in the process of transformation. By asking evocative questions, He creates inner space for reflection, enabling individuals to examine their beliefs, struggles, and spiritual readiness. True spiritual understanding, as modeled by Jesus, emerges not through indoctrination but through deeply personal engagement with divine truth revealed in encounter.

Moreover, Jesus’ questioning reveals sensitivity to psychological and social context. He does not impose answers but guides comprehension

progressively, based on the readiness of each listener. His empathetic and adaptive communication reaches people across different cultural and cognitive backgrounds. Thus, Jesus' interactions are not only informative but emotionally and spiritually transformative.

Every dialogue in Luke becomes a space of divine revelation. Jesus' conversations do not merely convey information; they become moments of encounter that invite radical reorientation of life. In this sense, His dialogical model functions prophetically—declaring God's message while simultaneously inviting existential participation in the truth. These interactions integrate rational, affective, and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

In contemporary church practice, Jesus' dialogical model offers a powerful paradigm for discipleship and evangelism. The church is called to nurture empathetic, wise communication—not through discursive dominance, but by building relational bridges across difference. In following Jesus' example, every pastoral or communal interaction becomes a transformative channel of grace that reawakens faith and restores human relationships in the light of divine love.

Jesus' Social Interaction with the Crowds: Relational Dynamics in Public Ministry

The Gospel of Luke consistently portrays Jesus' ministry as deeply embedded in the dynamics of public interaction. The crowds are not passive background actors; they actively seek, follow, and respond to Jesus' teaching and healing (Luke 5:15; 9:11). Their reactions reflect awe and interest, but also a lack of full comprehension regarding His messianic identity (Drewes, 2018, p. 313). These interactions are pedagogical but also existentially and politically charged, as Jesus' growing influence provokes anxiety among religious leaders—leading Judas to betray Him “when no crowd was present” (Luke 22:6).

The socio-economic diversity within the crowd—farmers, merchants, artisans, tax collectors, marginalized women, and even the elite—demonstrates the inclusive reach of Jesus' public ministry. The fact that outcasts felt safe approaching Him shows that Jesus created a socially safe space for the alienated (Fountain, 2006, p. 104). His presence initiated open social and verbal dialogue, dismantling boundaries of ritual purity and constructed moral hierarchies.

Jesus does not merely speak; He communicates authoritatively and contextually. Unlike the scribes, He does not appeal to rabbinic tradition but speaks with divine authority. Luke presents Jesus as a compelling communicator who uses relatable stories to convey profound theological truths, bridging social realities with eschatological hope in ways accessible to all (Fountain, 2006, p. 105). In doing so, Jesus forms both understanding and spiritual sensitivity through transformational narrative.

Furthermore, Jesus exhibits deep relational sensitivity. He is fully present with the crowds, attuned to their needs, and engages across age and class. His capacity to maintain attention and connection—even with children and youth—reveals His commitment to making divine truths accessible. His interaction with

the masses is not objectifying but integrative, transforming the crowd from passive audience into active participants in the Kingdom mission.

Social Interaction in Church Fellowship: Theological and Practical Foundations in Luke's Narrative

Understanding humans as both individual and social beings is crucial for appreciating the theological value of social interaction within the church. As a faith community, the church functions as a relational-theological space that reflects and supports humanity's social nature. Luke's portrayal of Jesus in constant social engagement demonstrates not only His salvific mission but also a model for communal life in faith (Hantono & Pramitasari, 2018, pp. 85–93). Jesus is not depicted in isolation but amid real social interactions across all levels of society—a representation of how the church should embody participatory and welcoming space.

Fellowship (*koinonia*) in the New Testament is not only vertical (with God) but also horizontal—manifested in mutual, life-giving relationships among members of Christ's body. In this light, church fellowship is not merely a product of faith but a means of enacting divine love. Yet, human complexity—with varied cultures, ages, and education—can lead to misunderstanding and division. Hence, social interaction in the church becomes a theological field that requires constant cultivation. Luke's narrative provides a foundation: genuine fellowship requires love that transcends difference (Putri & Wijaya et al., 2022, p. 400).

The church as *communio* reflects the relational nature of the Triune God. Jesus' interactions with all social groups show that the church cannot be exclusive or elitist. Rather, His encounters with the marginalized form a paradigm of grace-based, not merit-based, fellowship. The church is called to mirror the divine communion exemplified by Christ—a relationship that includes acceptance, forgiveness, and active participation. Thus, churches must critically reflect on whether their community life truly embodies an open, inclusive body of Christ—or merely perpetuates social segregation (Putri & Wijaya et al., 2022).

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' social interactions are always liberating and constructive. This becomes a mirror for how church relationships should function. When the church becomes a space for transformative encounter, communication within it moves beyond information-sharing to existential meeting—where divine intent meets human experience. However, church communication is not always effective. Breakdown in communication between leaders and congregants can seriously hinder spiritual growth and participation. Luke presents Jesus as a communicator who contextualizes truth through stories and accessible language so the message of the Kingdom can be joyfully understood (Waruwu & Rohy, 2023, p. 113).

Church communication, therefore, must be sensitive, clear, and relevant. Monological proclamation is insufficient; the church must foster dialogical, participatory communication responsive to the community's context and needs. Communication is not merely functional—it is theological: a channel for proclaiming the love and truth of God. If church communication fails to bridge

divine intention and congregational understanding, the church loses its transformative power. Thus, social interaction within the church is not an optional relational strategy—it is integral to the spirituality of ministry itself (Waruwu & Rohy, 2023, p. 114).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the narrative of Jesus' social interactions in the Gospel of Luke is not merely a historical account, but a theological construction that communicates the relational dimension of divine revelation in Christ. Through a narrative approach, Luke portrays Jesus as the sole Savior who intentionally engages in cross-boundary relationships—social, cultural, and religious. Stories of shared meals, personal conversations, acts of healing, and participation in daily community life reflect the open, hospitable, and inclusive character of the Kingdom of God.

In Luke's Gospel, social interaction functions as a primary medium of Gospel proclamation and incarnational revelation. Jesus' dialogical, empathetic, and participatory communication affirms that the transmission of divine truth is not authoritarian but transformative. This narrative reveals that authentic Christian spirituality is inseparable from social dimensions, and that human relationships are integral to discipleship.

Furthermore, Luke's emphasis on Jesus' encounters with diverse groups—tax collectors, women, foreigners, children, and those labeled as sinners—symbolizes the inclusive nature of the divine mission. These interactions challenge exclusive social structures and elevate human dignity in the light of divine love. Luke's theological distinctiveness lies in his presentation of Jesus' social interactions as a faith narrative that shapes the church's relational spirituality.

Thus, Jesus' social interactions in Luke provide both theological and practical foundations for the church to become a more participatory, relational, and just community. The Lukan narrative offers a biblical basis for reshaping hierarchical and closed church cultures into spaces of true fellowship—spaces marked by welcome, mutuality, and transformational love.

Practical Implications:

1. For Church Life

A deeper understanding of Jesus' social interactions in Luke calls for a transformation in how churches view ministry and fellowship. It is not enough to preach love; the church must embody it through practices of genuine acceptance, empathy, and mutual participation.

2. For Interpersonal Relations Among Believers

Jesus' model of social engagement offers a template for overcoming internal church conflicts, social stratification, and relational fragmentation. The church must become a safe space where all individuals are welcomed and nurtured spiritually and socially.

3. For the Church's Mission in a Pluralistic Society

Jesus' relational model in Luke provides a paradigm of inclusive mission that engages wisely with societal diversity while preserving Christian integrity in intercultural and interfaith contexts.

Recommendations:

1. For Local Churches

Local congregations are encouraged to develop ministry programs that prioritize relational formation among members and between the church and the wider community, beyond ritual worship alone.

2. For Theological and Christian Education Institutions

Seminaries and theological faculties should integrate narrative and interdisciplinary approaches—including biblical, sociological, and pastoral perspectives—into curricula to enrich students' understanding of social relations in the Gospels and their contemporary application.

3. For Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to further explore the dimension of social interaction in other Gospel narratives—such as John and Mark—to provide a more holistic understanding of Jesus' relational model and its theological implications.

4. For Ecumenical and Interdenominational Churches

Ecumenical and interdenominational bodies can use these findings as a common theological ground for building inclusive and participatory ministry networks (*koinonia*) in a world increasingly marked by social fragmentation.

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