

# THE GOOD NEWS

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*ACCORDING  
TO LUKE*





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# THE GOOD NEWS— ACCORDING TO LUKE

This Seasonal Guide takes us on a journey through Luke. Each week, we encourage you to read two chapters. Week one is chapters 9 and 10, with this pattern continuing until the end of Lent when we arrive at the Ascension. Each week we have selected a small extract from these larger readings to reflect on together, and we've borrowed some helpful historical context from a well-respected theologian (Craig Keener) that we think will help us in understanding the world that Jesus lived in, and the deep significance his words had in their time.

Our themes for Re-new Communities this year are Rongopai (the Good News), Sharing (telling others about Jesus), and Experience (encountering the Holy Spirit). Each week, as part of your group discussion, we encourage you to ask the question:

**How might this passage be good news to someone you know?  
What would you tell them?**

Luke's gospel is alive with spiritual, theological, cultural, and political depth. Some things you might notice are:

- The uplifting of women from their traditional roles in Jewish society
- God's deep concern for poor and ostracised people
- The presence of food and hospitality in many scenes
- God's commitment to 'seek out' those who are lost or broken
- The continual confrontation of Jesus' words with the occupying Roman force
- The constant embedded references to Old Testament scriptures

We hope you enjoy this journey.

—The Re-new Communities team.



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## WEEK 1 LUKE 10:38–42 (read LUKE 9–10)

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has

left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- This passage challenges the role designations for women in the first century. At the time, the role of disciple and minister was more important than a homemaker. Jesus subverts expectations by offering women roles usually only reserved for men.
- With this in mind, while Martha's work falls short of Mary's devotion, she is actually offering the best display of devotion she knows how in her cultural context.
- Mary's posture and eagerness to absorb Jesus' teaching would have been shocking to most Jewish men.
- Hospitality was enormously culturally important to first-century Jews, but in his exhortation of Mary here, Jesus acknowledges that nothing is more important than being his disciple.

*This commentary is adapted from the IVP Bible Background Commentary by Craig S Keener*

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### ONE QUESTION

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## WEEK 2 LUKE 11:1–4 (read LUKE 11–12)

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- Jewish people commonly addressed God as “Our heavenly Father”, but here they use an unusually intimate title of “Abba”, which is closest to “Papa”.
- Daily bread is a reference to the manna bread God provided to the Israelites in the desert. (Exodus 16:4).
- Verse three is written as ‘forgive us our debts’ in some translations as the Aramaic word for debt and sin could be used for both. Jewish law required the forgiveness of monetary debts on the seventh and fiftieth year.
- Some scholars also acknowledge the way debt had been used by wealthy landowners and the Roman occupying force to extort and drive Jews off their land. The forgiveness of debts alludes to God’s generous and loving power, rather than the oppressive power of Rome.
- Finally, Jesus encourages us to pray that we will not sin when we are tested.

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## WEEK 3 LUKE 14:16–24 (read LUKE 13–14)

Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned

and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- For Jews, The Kingdom of God was often represented as a banquet. Invitation was normally RSVP, so the guests who didn't arrive had already said they were coming. The banquet serves as a metaphor for God's invitation to His Kingdom of justice and love.
- The IVP Bible Background Commentary details how pitiful each of the various excuses are given their cultural context. These late cancellations would have been a grievous insult to the dignity of the host who had prepared the feast at great expense.
- Wealthy people in the Greco-Roman world would usually invite people of lower status to enhance their own reputation, but these would be of a certain level of 'respectability'. The kind of people the host invites are those who would have been considered 'unclean' and so reviled that they would have diminished rather than enhanced the host's reputation.

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## WEEK 4 *LUKE 15:1-7* (read *LUKE 15-16*)

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he told them this parable: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And

when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep’. Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- Tax gatherers and sinners were excluded from the religious community. There was further hatred of these tax collectors as they were viewed as collaborators with the occupying Roman forces.
- Because the Pharisees only attack Jesus and his Disciples company and not their conduct, we know they weren't drunk or behaving immorally. However, the same cannot be said for the others Jesus kept company with, hence the accusation. Here, Jesus is sharing a parable of God's character with a room of despised people. Unlike the despised poor of last week's passage, this is the despised wealthy.
- Jesus' parable is centred around a shepherd. Pharisees considered shepherding an unclean profession, so they are immediately at odds with his teaching.
- Something significant here is that Jewish teaching would emphasise God's forgiveness for repentant sinners, but Jesus takes it a step further by talking about God as a shepherd who goes and finds the unrepentant.

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## WEEK 5 *LUKE 18:1-8* (read *LUKE 17-18*)

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my accuser.’ For a while he refused, but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps

bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming’.” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- Many ancient societies had severe punishment for unjust judges.
- For the Jews listening, a widow was the ultimate example of an oppressed person because she had no means of support (Exodus 22:22-24, Psalm 146:9).
- Jesus uses a familiar Jewish phrase, “how much more” to explain that if even an unjust judge can find it in his heart to help a widow, how much more will a loving and just judge – God – look after widows and orphans.
- The passage ends with a foreshadowing of God’s final judgment at the end of all things. Will he find people who have devoted themselves to prayer and asking for his help? Will he find faith on earth?

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## WEEK 6 LUKE 19:1–10 (read LUKE 19:1–27)

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today”. So he hurried down and was happy

to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner”. Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- This happens in Jericho, a key customs post and a really wealthy city. Zacchaeus’ role as the ‘chief tax collector’ would have meant he didn’t need to cheat to get wealthy, but he had done it anyway.
- Despite the culture of hospitality at the time, it was not normal to invite yourself to someone’s home. Jesus does it anyway.
- As we’ve learnt in the other weeks of this guide, Jews would not associate with a tax collector who was both a sinner and a collaborator with the occupying Roman force.
- Zacchaeus makes restitution in response to Christ’s grace, rather than in order to receive grace. Jesus’ generosity of spirit is met by his repentance as he offers up even more than the religious laws would have required him to.
- In Ezekiel 34:6 and 11, God took over the mission of seeking out the lost sheep because the Jewish leaders had failed.

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## WEEK 7 LUKE 19:28–40 (read LUKE 19:28–end ch 21)

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks

on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop”. He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- Readers might interpret Jesus’ borrowing the animal as a parallel with royal Roman emissaries. A King is coming.
- These royal Roman emissaries would sometimes command the use of an animal to ride into town. In first century Israel most people were poor, so Christ borrowing a donkey (rather than something more grand) would have comforted them that he understood their position.
- The people’s cry, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”, is borrowed from Psalm 118:26. During the Passover season Psalms 113-118 were regularly sung, so this refrain would have been fresh on their lips.
- It may be that Jesus is referring to the ‘stones’ of the Temple (19:44, 20:17)

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## WEEK 8a LUKE 23:44–49 (read LUKE 22–23)

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and

said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things.

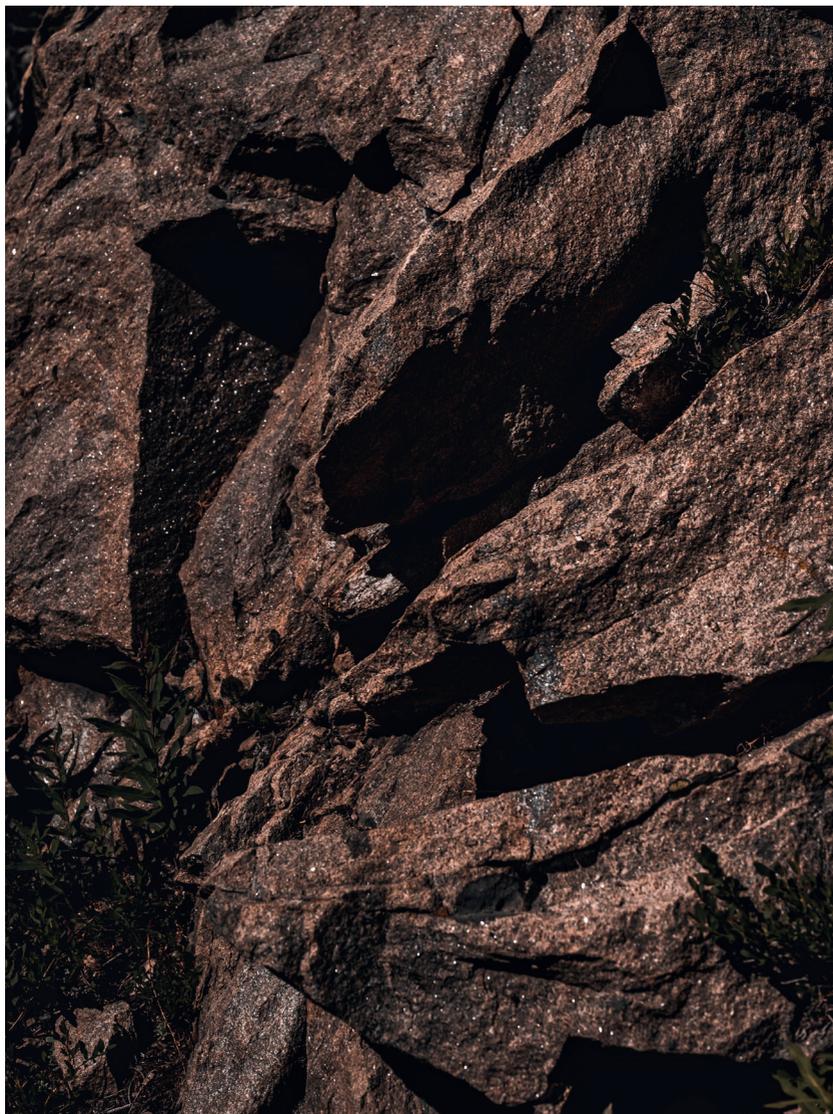
—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- Three in the afternoon is close to the time when the evening offerings would be made in the temple. Jesus' words: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit", are from Psalm 31:5 which was often recited at the evening offering.
- This curtain is probably the one between the holy of holies — inhabited only by God, and where no mortal could enter except the high priest once each year. There are two potential readings of this: firstly, the God provides access for all people to his presence, and secondly, that this is the departure of God from the temple (Ezekiel 10–11).
- Darkness was one of the plagues in Egypt (Exodus 10:22).
- Crosses were often closer to the ground than most of our artistic depictions show. The gospel writer, Luke, is passionate to note that Christ was 'innocent'.
- The Jewish women stand at a distance as it wasn't legal to publicly mourn after a body had been disposed of. They stand offering the only public mourning that is permitted. To some, the presence of these women with the disciples would have been scandalous.

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## WEEK 8b LUKE 24:1–12 (read LUKE 24)

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to the hands of

sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- The women head to the tomb as soon as daylight breaks.
- The stone was probably a large, diskshaped stone rolled along a groove in front of the tomb. That it had been rolled back could have suggested tampering or a tomb robbery.
- Angels often appeared as human beings in the Old Testament (Joshua 5:13).
- Part of the reason for the apostles’ unbelief that a resurrection of this nature contradicted their messianic expectations; another reason may have been that Jewish officials considered the witness of women nearly worthless, because they regarded women as unstable and undependable.

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## WEEK 9 LUKE 24:44–53

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses

of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

—*New Revised Standard Version*

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### HELPFUL CONTEXT

- Jewish teachers sometimes spoke of God “opening their eyes” to his truths, with Old Testament precedent for this from Psalm 119:18.
- Jesus demonstrates deep insight into the scriptures, likely referencing Deuteronomy 18:15–18, Isaiah 9, 11, and 53. Jesus bases his Messiahship on principles of the Old Testament.
- While Jesus disagrees with most of his contemporaries on interpretation of the Old Testament, he uses it to define his mission and agrees with them concerning its enormous authority.
- The Spirit was especially associated with the ability to prophesy, to speak as God inspired a person to speak.
- Ancient writers often framed literature by starting and ending on the same point. Luke begins his gospel in chapter one with Zechariah at the temple, and ends it with the disciples back at the temple praising God in chapter 24.

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Re-new Communities are part of  
the Anglican Diocese of Wellington