

Luke Reading Plan

Fifteen studies through the Gospel of Luke — devotional, prayer and reflection for each.

Study 1 — Introduction to Luke

Luke 1

Getting some background information is always helpful before jumping into a book of the Bible.

If you asked the average church attendee or someone who's familiar with the Bible, "Who wrote most of the New Testament?" you're usually going to get the answer, "the apostle Paul." And that's partly true. Paul did write most of the books in the New Testament. But in terms of the number of words written, most of the pages in our New Testament were written by Luke.

Luke wrote two large documents that account for about 28 percent of the New Testament. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, and Acts is really just a continuation of the book of Luke. The Gospel of Luke gives an account of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Then Acts gives an account of how the early church got started.

Luke became a Jesus follower several years after Jesus walked the earth, most likely under Paul's influence. Luke was probably a Gentile (someone without a Jewish background), so he would have come to know and understand Jesus without being raised learning the Hebrew Scriptures.

Professionally, it appears Luke was a medical doctor, and that he left his full-time profession to travel with Paul and do the work of spreading the good news that people could access God through his Son, Jesus.

Luke wasn't a firsthand witness to the teachings and miracles of Jesus, but he took the time to collect all the information he could, summarize it, and put it in an orderly fashion. There were tons of stories circulating about Jesus, and Luke was passionate about organizing those stories in a way to help people understand who Jesus was and what he came for.

One of his main sources was Mark, the same Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark by documenting a lot of what Peter told him about Jesus. So if you ever notice that a lot of Luke's Gospel looks like Mark's Gospel, that's why. And there's also some overlap with Matthew's Gospel. Matthew, Mark, and Luke share some of the same stories about Jesus with different details here and there. That's why those three Gospels are known as the Synoptic Gospels. "Synoptic" means "seen in a similar way."

But Luke found some other nuggets about Jesus that are only in his account and not in the other Gospels... things like Jesus's parables of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan.

Ultimately, Luke wanted to present a clear, historical narrative of the person and work of Jesus as the Saviour of all people.

We hope as you journey through Luke, you'll see God in a fresh, new way.

"Heavenly Father, as we begin to journey through Luke's account together, help me better understand the good news of Jesus and how he brought the kingdom of God to us and those around us. Amen."

Study 2 — Luke 2

Luke 2

The angel Gabriel announced that two babies would be born six months apart. Find out who they were.

In the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, we get to eavesdrop on the angel Gabriel, who gives two birth announcements, in a sense, to two different sets of parents. And for what it's worth, the two Moms are related... cousins in some form or fashion. At any rate, these two babies will be born about six months apart.

The first baby will end up being one of the great prophets of the day: John the Baptist (or John the Baptizer), whose main purpose will be to let people know that the long-awaited rescuer, the coming King of the Jews, has arrived. And John's parents were Zechariah and Elizabeth.

The other announcement was for the upcoming birth of Jesus, the Saviour who was coming to restore a connection between God and his people. We read in Luke 2 about the humble circumstances surrounding Jesus's birth.

One fascinating observation has to do with how OPPOSITE the circumstances were surrounding the birth of these two Hebrew boys. For instance...

Jesus's parents, Mary and Joseph, have no social significance to speak of. Joseph made a presumably modest living as a young carpenter, probably working for his dad, and they lived in a town that was just a small dot on the map.

Zechariah and Elizabeth, on the other hand (John the Baptist's parents), lived very near Israel's capital city of Jerusalem. Zechariah was a priest with important responsibilities at the temple.

Neither couple had any reason whatsoever to believe they would have a baby, but they had sort of opposite reasons for why they thought that. For Mary and Joseph (who weren't married), they had yet to, you know, try to conceive. For Zechariah and Elizabeth, they hadn't been able to have children in all their years of marriage... and now they were old.

So to both couples, this whole "You've got a baby on the way" came as quite a shock.

But isn't that how it works sometimes? In one of the most incredible examples (well, two examples), we see God working in a way no one could have imagined.

Something remarkable, though, is what these couples had in common. While neither couple expected a pregnancy, both trusted God even when it didn't make sense.

For us, it can be tough to try and make sense of our circumstances. But regardless of where we find ourselves, we can trust God through those circumstances.

"Heavenly Father, give me the wisdom to walk in your ways, even in the midst of seasons I don't understand. Amen."

Study 3 — Luke 3

Luke 3

Luke wanted to leave no doubt that Jesus was the fulfillment of many Jewish prophecies.

The Jews had known for several thousand years that God promised to use Abraham and his descendants as influential people. Prophets for many generations foretold of a day Israel would have its own land and be a blessing to the entire world. And one day a new king was going to lead them and represent them. Not only was this king going to make them a great nation, but he would help restore what was a broken relationship with God.

But after years and years of hearing that prophecy, God went silent. For 400 years—around 15 generations—there were no significant words from any of God's prophets.

In Luke 3, that silence was broken by John the Baptist. He told anyone who would listen, "The wait is over. The King we've been waiting for is here! In fact, he's right over there. It's Joseph's son Jesus."

And then Luke does something brilliant. To anyone who may have pushed back... to anyone who may have said, "Wait a minute... the prophets spoke of this coming king, and he's supposed to be a descendant of Abraham. And not only Abraham, but there are several key people who are supposed to be in the family tree of the Messiah." To anyone wondering about that, Luke lists a genealogy, traced backwards starting with Jesus and going all the way back to Adam. And those names anyone would be looking for in order to fulfill the words of the prophets are indeed on the list... Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, and Judah.

When you read that list of names in Chapter 3, don't breeze by it too quickly. Maybe even say each name aloud, just as a reminder that these were real people and not just names on a page. Some of the names may sound familiar, but most of them were just everyday, imperfect people that God used to bring his plans to fruition. In some ways, we're like that. God uses us for his purposes. Through our lives, our choices, our words, God uses us. We are his plan for showing those around us who he is.

"Heavenly Father, thank you for making me part of your plan to impact those around me. Amen."

Study 4 — Luke 4 & 5

Luke 4 & 5

It can be tempting to take shortcuts to get what we want, but we miss out on something when we do.

We don't have many details about Jesus's life before his public ministry began. Matthew and Luke give us some highlights surrounding Jesus's birth, and Luke tells us a quick story about Jesus bailing on his family for a few days when he was about 12 when he learned and taught at the temple. But that's about it.

Most of the stories written about Jesus start when he was about 30 years old. It's around this age when he really began to embrace and live out his role as the Son of God. Something happened then. We don't know what, or how his heavenly Father communicated it to him, but it was time. It was time for him to step out of the shadows and show people who he really was... to show people who God really was.

His first way of doing that was demonstrating that he could withstand even the greatest of temptations and still remain focused on his mission that lay ahead. In Luke 4, we read that God directed Jesus into the wilderness, where he ate nothing for a solid forty days. It's then—hungry and tired—that

Jesus is tempted by the devil himself. Food, power... he would get both of those if he'd just jump through a couple of the devil's hoops. But he resists.

The enemy was trying to get him to doubt God the Father, but Jesus repeatedly showed that he believed that what his Father said could be trusted.

It's not quite the same as what Jesus experienced, but we're faced with choices on a regular basis: Do I trust what God has for me—or will have for me in the future—is good enough? Or am I willing to take a shortcut for short-term satisfaction? For example:

Can God provide intimacy for me in a healthy way, or do I take the shortcut of finding intimacy in the wrong way?

Can I learn to be content with whatever material possessions I have, or am I willing to take a shortcut to gain even more?

Do I have a need to gain or hang onto popularity or power? Am I willing to take a shortcut ethically to try to get them or keep them?

"Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us that Jesus was able to trust you in the midst of great temptation. Help me to trust you as well. Amen."

Study 5 — Luke 6 & 7

Luke 6 & 7

The mark of a Jesus follower has to do with how to treat those who are different from us.

Imagine for a second that your mate is working a shift at the local café. You know he's rostered that morning, so you and a few friends decide to head down for brekkie.. But when you get there, you can see straight away it's a shocker of a morning for him. They're short-staffed, orders are piling up, and customers are getting a bit cranky. Your mate is clearly under the pump.

Now even though you're paying customers, what would you say to him?

"Hey, don't stress about us! We're all good. Just get to us when you can. No dramas."

And you'd actually feel glad about doing that, wouldn't you? Because you've just given your mate a bit of breathing room. You've made his rough day a little easier

But according to Dr. Richard Beck, the author of the book *Unclean*, there has been no significant moral demonstration on your part. As Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, some of which appears in Luke 6, even the pagans do that. Everybody takes care of their own people.

A mark of Jesus followers is how we think about and treat the people who are not our people. It's when we offer the same hospitality to those who look different, vote differently, or live differently. It's when we truly see those people as just as valuable as anyone else.

As Jesus said, Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35– 36)

"Heavenly Father, help me see people like you see them. And help me treat them like you, through Christ, have treated me. Amen."

Study 6 — Luke 8

Luke 8

In one of Jesus's parables, he talked about obstacles to a thriving faith.

It's no secret that Jesus did much of his teaching in the form of parables. A parable is a fictional story with a spiritual lesson. And, typically, when Jesus told a parable, he didn't explicitly tell the exact meaning of the parable. It was up to the listener to decipher what it meant. In fact, as we read in Luke 8:10, Jesus told his disciples that was sort of the reason he taught so much in parables. It was one of the ways to tell if someone was really interested in the things of God. If they understood the parable, or if they were curious enough to try to find the meaning of the parable, that was an indicator of someone trying to take a next step in their faith. But for those who would hear parables and not really try to understand them, well, that was an indicator they may not be interested in what Jesus was trying to tell them about God. And to illustrate that point, he told them a parable. So yes, he told a parable to explain why he told parables!

In this particular parable (also in Luke 8), we hear about a farmer who sowed (or planted) seeds in several different places. He accidentally dropped some of the seeds on his walking path and the birds ate them. Some others got dropped among rocks and thorn bushes, and a few sprouts grew but died pretty quickly. Some got placed into good soil. As you can guess, the seeds that ended up in the good soil yielded a way better crop than the seeds that landed in the other places. In each situation, the seed was the same. It was the environment that made all the difference.

The disciples asked him what all that meant, and he told them: "The seed is the Word of God, or the message of God—something to point people toward God. And there are times when that message doesn't really take root in someone's life, but sometimes it does. And when it does, there's growth—not just immediate growth, but sustained growth. There's long-term change."

Maybe you can relate to what he was talking about in that parable. Perhaps you remember a season when your faith was a big part of your life. But now, if you're honest, maybe it's not. And just like some of those seeds were trampled and eaten by birds or fell into rocks or thorns, obstacles got in the way of your relationship with God being a bigger part of your life. If that's the case, what's that obstacle? What would it look like to remove it? Is it still even there? What would it take for you to dig into that good soil and see real, life-changing growth?

"Heavenly Father, give me the desire and strength to know you more. I want my faith in you and my love for those around me to grow for the rest of my life. Amen."

Study 7 — Luke 9

Luke 9

Remembering great moments or seasons of life can inspire us going forward.

In Luke 9, we read about something commonly called “the transfiguration.” Jesus and three of his disciples went up onto a mountain to pray, and something miraculous happened. Jesus’s physical appearance changed to show he truly was divine, and visions of two heroes of the Old Testament (Moses and Elijah) appeared with Jesus as well. As you can imagine, Jesus’s friends who saw this—Peter, James, and John—would have been stunned. And Luke points out that the three saw this as they were on the verge of being asleep, so that must have been quite the wake- up moment!

For them to see Jesus in a deified state like that is something called a “theophany,” meaning “God appearing.” There are only a few theophanies mentioned in the Bible, where people got to see a physical appearance of God in some sort of supernatural, miraculous fashion like the one Luke mentions. And with Moses and Elijah to appear alongside Jesus was an indicator Jesus was there to fulfill what God promised centuries ago—to send someone to restore people’s relationship with God and to make God’s people a blessing for the entire world.

The transfiguration was so incredible that Peter offered to build a shelter for each of the three men who had appeared. Now, these shelters Peter was talking about were most likely a type of booth used in one of the Jewish celebrations—a type of booth a Jewish person would come to for seven days straight. It was Peter’s way of saying, “Can we just keep this moment going for a while? Can it stay this way? This is incredible.”

Certainly there was a reason God wanted Peter, James, and John to see Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in this glorified state. This transfiguration gave them a clearer picture of who Jesus was. For Peter to proclaim, “It is good for us to be here” is one of the great understatements of all time.

But that moment wouldn’t last forever. It was brief. The three friends would come down from that mountain with Jesus, and their ministry would continue. But it would continue with the memory of something that would inspire them going forward.

Occasionally, you’ll have some spiritual highs. Maybe it’s a song you hear at just the right time. Maybe you feel like God brought someone into your life that helped change you. Or maybe you feel like you were witness to a bona fide miracle. Whatever your moment was (or moments), it didn’t last forever. However, there’s no telling what God can do with that moment. From time to time, it’s good to think back and remember one of those moments. How can remembering it inspire you to live out your faith and inspire others to live out theirs?

“Heavenly Father, thank you for those things that inspire us to take next steps in our faith. May we use them to grow closer to you and impact those around us. Amen.”

Study 8 — Luke 10 & 11

Luke 10 & 11

Today we’ll read about Jesus teaching his disciples how to pray.

You don’t have to tell anyone else your answers, but if someone were to ask you questions like:

How many minutes do you think you’ve prayed during the last seven days?

If you pray at a certain time of day, when is it?

What do you pray for?

How would you answer those questions? While there are no right or wrong answers, prayer is simply an opportunity to connect with your heavenly Father on a personal level.

In Chapter 11, we read how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. He literally said, “When you pray, say this.” And he goes on to say what we know as “The Lord’s Prayer.” The Gospel of Matthew also mentions this story, so you can find the same prayer there as well. There are a few minor word differences between the Matthew version and the Luke version, but the two accounts are talking about the same thing.

In that prayer, Jesus covers so much ground with so few words. He tells them to address this eternal God—a perfect, holy God, who resides in heaven—as “Father.” It cleared up any confusion that may have existed in terms of who they should be praying to or how they should view God. Even though God is vastly different and greater than anything they could imagine, they were to think of him as a perfect heavenly Father, and that’s who they should pray to.

The Lord’s Prayer is a beautiful portrait of how God is all-powerful and in a category of his own yet at the same time able to relate to us.

So today, take a moment to slowly and reflectively pray this to your heavenly Father.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.”

Study 9 — Luke 12

Luke 12

If you wrestle with over-prioritizing material possessions, see what Jesus had to say.

On more than one occasion, Jesus talked to his followers about worldly possessions. And on one occasion in particular, he hit the topic from a couple of angles. In Luke 12, he tells his disciples what to do when it comes to the bare necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. He tells them: “Don’t worry about things like that. God knows you need that stuff. You’ll be taken care of in that regard.”

But then Jesus takes it a step further. He tells those listening: “Sell your possessions and give to the poor.” It’s important to remember he’s speaking directly to his disciples here. He’s not necessarily telling every single person to get rid of everything they’ve got. But still he gives a great principle on why he told his disciples that, and it’s a principle we should pay close attention to.

In that same verse, he offers this thought: “Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.” In other words, hold your material possessions very loosely. They’re not going to last forever anyway. Put your attention toward things that will matter in the halls of eternity.

In verse 34, Jesus says something that gives another great guideline when it comes to approaching the topic of possessions. He declares, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jesus knew it would be easy for possessions to become what people treasure. And he didn’t want people’s hearts to be wrapped around things that won’t last.

To bring the words of Jesus into your situation, ask yourself: Where do I want my heart to be? Your heart (that is, your attention, your energy) will go somewhere, and there are only so many places it can go. It's going to gravitate toward the thing (or things) you treasure.

So, if you find your heart going toward a lot of things that don't really matter—and it's always at the expense of the things that do matter—it's time to consider if something should stay or go.

If your heart follows the things you treasure, don't hold too tightly to those treasures that don't mean very much. Things that don't matter in the long run shouldn't eat up a lot of space in our hearts.

"Heavenly Father, help me make decisions that point my heart to what matters most. Amen."

Study 10 — Luke 13 & 14

Luke 13 & 14

In ways that got people's attention, Jesus often would remind people that following him comes at a cost.

Sometimes Jesus would say something that was hard to hear, something that would upset some people or at the very least cause them to rethink something they had originally thought. And a lot of times, Jesus would save those heart-piercing statements for his closest friends, his disciples.

But in Chapter 14, we read where Jesus said something to a large crowd of people that surely caused everyone to get quiet and maybe ask, Did I hear him correctly? Here's what he said in verses 26 and 27. And remember, he's speaking to a lot of people, people who had made the choice to give up part of their day to be around him.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple."

Wait, what? I've got to hate my family to be a Jesus follower? Well, no. Of course not. It would be counter to the entire ethic of the New Testament to hate your enemies, much less your family members. So if Jesus wasn't being literal here, what's he talking about? And why did he use such strong words to get his point across?

It's worth remembering the original setting where Jesus first said this. He knew that following him, showing loyalty to him, could come at a great cost for people. In the not-too-distant future, he would be seen as a criminal to some. If you were a known Jesus follower, your reputation and perhaps even your life might be in danger.

So this was Jesus's way of asking, Are you absolutely sure you want to follow me? Because the amount of resolve it will take, the commitment it will take, the sacrifice it will take to be an all-in follower of me makes the loyalty you have to your family pale in comparison. Are you really in?

It can be hard to follow Jesus. It takes praying for strength and wisdom to follow Jesus. It's hard to forgive someone who doesn't deserve it, but we're better at life when we do. It's hard to love someone who isn't very lovable, but it makes our lives better when we do. It's hard to put the needs and well-being of others before our own.

Following Jesus can be hard and it comes at a cost, but we become better at life and those around us benefit when we do.

"Heavenly Father, give me wisdom as I look to follow Jesus. Amen."

Study 11 — Luke 15 & 16

Luke 15 & 16

In today's reading, Luke showed Jesus using three different illustrations to communicate something important.

Sometimes you want someone in your life to understand something so badly that you think of several different ways to tell them. Marketing experts say a message has to be repeated a number of times (and in different ways) before a potential customer becomes an actual customer.

In Luke 15, we see this principle play out. Luke has grouped three of Jesus's parables, and all of them have a similar message. It's Luke's way of saying, "Hey, I've carefully investigated and documented what I think people need to know about Jesus. And there's one topic in particular I need to camp on because it's so important."

The three parables are about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. At the end of each parable, Jesus gives the bottom line. Listen to how similar the main points are:

At the end of the lost sheep parable, Jesus said, "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

At the end of the lost coin parable: "There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And, finally, at the end of the lost son parable: "We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

All three parables are about something that was gone—lost. But then it was found. A relationship was restored.

A couple of things stand out. The main takeaway regarding these parables is that God is in the restoration business. He longs for people to come to him.

But notice something else. In all three parables, there's a celebration. It's one thing for people to come to God, or come back to God... but when that happens, it's cause for pause. When someone who was far from God is brought near to him because of the work of Jesus, it calls for celebration!

May we never get tired of God's work of restoration. Anytime someone begins (or resumes) their walk with God, it's nothing short of miraculous, and it's a sign to us that God is still very much at work.

"Heavenly Father, thank you for making it possible for me to come to you and call you Father. When I see someone begin to walk with you, help me mark those moments to remember you are still at work. Amen."

Study 12 — Luke 17 & 18

Luke 17 & 18

We all need a bite of humble pie on occasion, and today we see where Jesus served up a slice.

There are times when we all need (and sometimes get) a slice of humble pie—a reality check. We need the people closest to us to remind us: When the way we present ourselves shows that we think we're better than other people, we're getting off track.

We all know people who come across as elitist or arrogant, but when it's us, it can be a tough pill to swallow. It's hard when someone says something to us like:

"It seems like you shared your opinion as if it were a fact, and I think it rubbed some people the wrong way."

"Did you notice that you didn't make eye contact with our waiter or say thank you?"

"When you were talking to the group, it came across more as demanding than requesting."

It's hard to hear things like that, but we all need it every once in a while.

In Luke 18, Jesus shares a parable about two people: one was a religious leader—a Pharisee, who knew and tried to live by all of God's laws; The other was a tax collector, an occupation notorious for stealing from people.

The Pharisee seems to go out of his way to not only publicly declare how awesome he is but to put the tax collector in his place. He says, God, I want to publicly thank you that I'm not like that guy! Contrast that with the tax collector, who says, God help me! I'm a sinner! Jesus tells us which one had the better perspective, and it's pretty obvious who that was.

But the gut punch came when Jesus gave the meaning of the parable to his listeners... and these were listeners who needed to hear it. They were people who thought they were better than everyone else. They thought their opinions, their way of doing life, was the only way to please God. Here's what Jesus said: "All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Here's the good news: When we think too highly of ourselves, most of the time it's only temporary. It won't be long before we're humbled—when we're brought back down to earth. The question is... are we wise enough to stay there?

"Heavenly Father, help me remember that everyone has equal value, regardless of position, financial status, or anything else. We're all equally in need of you—including me. Amen."

Study 13 — Luke 19 & 20

Luke 19 & 20

Jesus's triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem on an animal designed for service fulfilled a prophecy.

When Jesus was just days away from being crucified, he wanted his message to be clear. He was the Messiah, sent from God to show Israel and the rest of the world what God was really like. The kingdom of God had arrived, and people needed to know he was the King of this kingdom. But people also needed to know he was a different kind of king. He was a king that had power, but he would use

that power for the sake of others.

For instance, when a “normal” king would start his reign, it would begin with some sort of triumphal entry when the time was right... showing his power. But Jesus would make no such entry. His triumphal entry, as it were, would look different.

In Luke 19, Jesus tells his disciples to go and get a slow-walking, small, never-ridden-before donkey. His triumphal entry to make it clear he was a king would be on a donkey.

Make no mistake, a donkey is a strong animal, and a donkey was thought of in higher regard then than it is today. In those times, any animal that could transport people or things was important. So the fact that Jesus was riding a donkey didn't come across as some sort of joke.

This particular donkey, though, a young colt, had not yet been trained to have someone ride it. So in that regard, it was impressive that Jesus was able to ride it. But still, it was no stallion. It was an animal meant for carrying things. It was meant for service. It was a peaceful animal. For Jesus to ride on a donkey was a demonstration of humility. It was perfect—it represented power to be used for service.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Zechariah predicted to the people of Israel: See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

In that prophecy, we see a remarkable contrast that describes Jesus: righteous and victorious, but also lowly and humble.

As Jesus followers, we should look to model in the same way. Whenever we're given a position of influence—as a parent, a friend, a job title—our calling is to take that position and use it to elevate others.

Near the same time Luke was writing his Gospel, the apostle Paul said this in his letter to the Philippians:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant (Philippians 2:5–7)

“Heavenly Father, help me use whatever influence I have to inspire people to follow Jesus. Amen.”

Study 14 — Luke 21 & 22

Luke 21 & 22

Passover is celebrated to remember the Jewish exodus from Egypt, but has an additional meaning to Jesus followers.

Over 1,400 years before Jesus was born, the people of Israel found themselves captive, serving as slaves in the mighty Egyptian Empire. After 400 years of this oppression, Moses was called by God to lead these Jews out of bondage. Through Moses, God sent ten supernatural signs— different types of plagues—to demonstrate his power and try to convince the Egyptian Pharaoh to grant the Jews freedom. Pharaoh refused—until the tenth and most devastating plague.

The tenth and final plague would kill all firstborn males in Egypt—a brutal and tough-to-handle punishment for the Egyptian nation, but one that exhibited God's deep protection for his people. Before this final plague ensued, God instructed Moses to have the Israelites paint their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. This act would be a signal for the plague to pass over their homes and spare the Israelites. They were being commanded to sacrifice a life (in this case, a lamb). The death of that lamb would give them life and lead them into freedom.

These events are still celebrated each year by Jewish families at Passover, when God allowed death to “pass over” them. Passover is (in general) a seven-day Jewish celebration. But one meal in particular, called the Seder (SAY-der) meal, is held the first night of Passover. Each item of food and drink in the meal has a special meaning, tied to Israel's exodus from Egyptian slavery some 3,500 years before.

This Seder meal is almost certainly the very same meal Jesus would have had with his disciples, which is commonly known as the Last Supper. As Luke writes in Chapter 22:

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

Many Jews around the world have come to believe that Jesus (Yeshua) is indeed the fulfillment of numerous prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures, prophecies that God would one day send a Saviour for their people. These Jewish Christians, or Messianic Jews, still celebrate Passover. They still enjoy the Seder meal. But the elements of that meal take on an additional meaning.

In one portion of the Seder meal, three pieces of unleavened bread (called “matzah”) are stacked together. The middle piece is taken out, broken, and one of the broken pieces is buried inside a cloth. While this simple piece of food—bread—originally may have represented the years of poverty the Jews endured during slavery, for Jewish followers of Jesus, this middle piece of bread has taken on an additional meaning. It now represents the second member of the Trinity— Jesus. His body was broken and buried.

In Luke 22:19, while Jesus was having the Seder meal with his friends, Luke tells us: He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

Christians all over the world do just that, in the regular observance of Communion. We remember: Jesus's body was broken for us. His death was a perfect sacrifice for our sin. Just as the Israelites were saved by a lamb's blood, so we are saved by the blood of Christ. His blood restores our spiritual lives by granting us access to our heavenly Father.

“Heavenly Father, may we always remember the sacrifice you made by sending your Son to do something we could never do for ourselves. Amen.”

Study 15 — Luke 23 & 24

Luke 23 & 24

On the last day of this devotional, we see that the death and resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new era.

It was finished. Jesus was crucified. His permanent sacrifice would take the place of all the temporary sacrifices people had used for centuries as payment for their sins. The separation between a perfect God and rebellious people had been removed. Jesus had made a way for people to truly, intimately, and eternally know their heavenly Father. This day of Jesus's death is remembered each year on the Christian holiday of Good Friday.

But Jesus's sacrificial death is only part of the story. Three days later, his return to life—his resurrection—became the defining element of our faith. It's his resurrection that reminds us that God has the power to overcome death—his own, as well as ours. If Jesus is able to predict his own death, allow it to happen, and then return to life, God is able to do the same for us. The resurrection gives enormous credibility to all of Jesus's talk about a heavenly life after death.

It's easy to gloss over this more than 2,000 years later, but the death and resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new way of connecting with God. This was a new era. For thousands of years prior, God's chosen people, the Jews, had operated under a particular covenant—a promise God made to provide them with their own permanent territory and to use them to bless the entire world—a promise to restore things to their proper order. That promise had been passed down through a series of covenants God made with people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, and the prophets.

But those covenants were all foreshadowing the next—and ultimate—part of God's plan with Jesus.

In this new covenant, people related with God in a new and restored way. God's love for them hadn't changed. People's love for God hadn't changed. But the way people related to God and the way God related to people did change. And it changed in a way that made God much more accessible and understandable.

This new era—this new kingdom, as Jesus called it—was not just for the Jews. It was something everyone could participate in, no matter where they were from or what they had done.

After Jesus's resurrection, he spent several weeks with his followers before leaving this earth to return to his heavenly Father. He instructed his followers to keep the message of the new covenant alive and make sure it was spread to the entire world. God provided a permanent way for a broken relationship to be restored, and now it needed to be shared.

As part of his church, that's where we come in. We're charged to follow Jesus in a way that shows the people of this world they are not forgotten. They matter. And they are invited to participate in the kingdom of God. It's our responsibility to make sure they know that.

"Heavenly Father, thank you for your love. Thank you for calling us sons and daughters. May we follow Jesus in a way that inspires others to follow him as well. Amen."