



THE GOOD BOOK CLUB

Participant Guide

The Good Book Club Bible Study for Luke-Acts

Introduction

We are so pleased you are participating in The Good Book Club, a joint venture between Forward Movement, Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry, and more than twenty-five organizations from around the Episcopal Church. The Good Book Club has been convened to encourage each of us to engage the Bible—the living and loving Word of God—on a daily basis. In our research with individuals, faith communities, and faith leaders, we have learned that daily Bible reading and study has the power to transform our relationship with Jesus.

Each Bible study is designed to explore a portion of the scripture readings for the week, to place them in historical and theological context, and to ask questions about what God is saying to us today. We encourage you to follow along with daily reading of Luke and Acts through Forward Day by Day (in print, on our website, as a podcast, or on our Forward Movement app). By the end of Pentecost, you will have read two complete books of the Bible!

As we endeavor to look and sound and love more like Jesus, reading the Bible becomes our greatest tool for discipleship. Thank you for joining the journey of The Good Book Club, and we look forward with joyful hearts to reading with you the stories of God in Christ and the birth of the Church as told in Luke and Acts.

We also encourage you to continue the conversation online with #goodbookclub or on The Good Book Club Facebook page.

Schedule

This schedule presumes weekly meetings, starting the week after Ash Wednesday, with breaks during Holy Week and Easter Week. Then the studies resume through Pentecost.

Week 1: Brief Introduction to Luke-Acts and Luke 1:46-56

This week, you will discuss Luke and Acts as a multi-volume work intended to be read together. You will discuss the history of salvation as told in the Old and New Testaments and set up the context for the rest of the study sessions. You will also look at some of the ways in which Luke's masterful storytelling helps us to connect Jesus to the story of Israel.

Week 2: Luke 4:16-30

This week, we will discuss what is often considered the Luke's thesis statement for Jesus' entire ministry in Galilee. We will pay special attention to the healing miracles, the spiritual aspects of these events and our understandings of wholeness. We will also pay special attention to some of the implicit anti-Jewish language and responses recorded in this section. Additionally, we'll visit the sometimes problematic idea of divine favoritism.

Week 3: Luke 10:25-37

This week, we will discuss the parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the most beloved stories Jesus shares with us. We'll take a long, hard look at the divisions between the Jews and the Samaritans, as well as taking a second look at the question of who our neighbors are and how we ought to love them.

Week 4: Luke 12:22-34

This week, we will take a look at possessions and wealth and how we manage both in light of our relationship to God. We will consider the lilies and the ravens, as well as viable strategies for living faithful lives in a consumer-driven culture.

Week 5: Luke 16:19-31 and preview of Luke 24:13-35

This week, we will take a deep dive into the realm of liberation theology. This may be a difficult concept for some folks to grasp—or at least uncomfortable to ponder—but it is an important concept for us to consider. How do we reconcile these texts from Luke with other biblical perspectives on wealth?

Week 6: Acts 1:1-11

This week, we will take a close look at Acts and the events surrounding the birth of the church. Events like the Ascension and Pentecost will come sharply into focus, and we will consider ways the Holy Spirit is still ministering to and through us today.

Week 7: Acts 6:1-7

This week, we'll spend some time discussing a major conflict in the midst of the early church. We'll unpack the push and pull of Hellenism, traditional Jewish understandings, and how this situation gives rise to the office of deacon, as well as provides for a bigger table and tent for the growing church.

Week 8: Acts 9:1-22

Participant Guide: Introduction

© 2018 Forward Movement

This week, we will meet Paul and notice a shift in the narrative of Acts. We will discuss Paul's personality and the intensity of his character. In discussing Paul's gifts, we will also spend some time thinking about how our gifts can often cut both ways, being helpful and hurtful at times, and explore some strategies for how to use our gifts in our faith communities and in our personal lives.

Week 9: Acts 11:1-18

This week, we will take a serious and substantive look at Peter's vision and why it is tied to the conversion of Cornelius. We'll discuss the ideas of clean/unclean and why Peter's vision was such a game-changer for the church, as well as the conflict that ensued and the difficulty of implementing change.

Week 10: Acts 15:1-31

Once again, we'll look at one of the pivotal conflicts in the early church and see how far we have (or haven't come) in the intervening 2000 years. Discussion and disagreement about circumcision and kosher dietary laws as well as Greek and Roman social/cultural influences may remind us of the conflicts and conversations that we are having in our homes, faith communities, and in the wider world. We'll also take time to talk over the life-changing habit of sharing meals.

Week 11: Acts 16:16-40 and preview of Acts 28:23-31

This week, we look at another liberation story and talk about Paul's second missionary expedition. We will discuss the idea of making "good trouble" in addition to creating some strategies for studying the remainder of Acts on our own and pondering the "happy ending" of the overarching story of the emergence of the church.

Author

David Creech is assistant professor of religion at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Prior to earning his Ph.D. in theology from Loyola University Chicago, David earned a B.A. in anthropology from the University of California at Santa Barbara and an M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He spends most of his days reading, thinking, teaching, and writing on early Christianities. In his free time he works as a short order cook for his three delightful kids.



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 1: Introduction to Luke-Acts and Luke 1:46-56
Participant Notes

Bread and Butter

- This Bible study will be a journey through the life of Christ and the movement of the early church.
- What do you know about Luke and Acts? What do you expect to learn or be challenged by in this study?
- Saint Luke is traditionally ascribed authorship of Luke-Acts. Some scholars believe he was a Greek-speaking Jew, while others contend he was a Gentile. Luke has an amazing gift for relating the stories of Jesus and the disciples.
- In Luke-Acts, we are given the broadest, most complete story of God in Christ—literally from womb to tomb and beyond to the birth of the Church.
- Briefly review and skim discussion handouts.

Meat and Potatoes

- Luke and Acts is a multi-volume work, intended to be read together (Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-2).
- Luke-Acts is a story of salvation history – what God began in the Old Testament God continued to do in Christ and then through the early church.
- Luke has a perspective (helpfully he sets out his agenda for us in Luke 4:16-21 and Acts 1:6-8).
- Luke’s strategy in chapters 1-2 is to link clearly Israel’s story to the story of Jesus.
- He tells stories that sound like Old Testament stories—stories of barren women, temple priests, and miraculous visitations.
- He tells stories using the language that *sounds* like the Old Testament. He writes in a style that mimics the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.
- Luke is a master storyteller with exceptional command of Greek and deeply aware of the Hebrew Bible (in its Greek translation) and its traditions. He uses multiple strategies early on to connect the Christ event to Israel’s story. He also wants to draw attention to particular themes present Israel’s story and emphasize those in his story about Jesus.

Something Sweet

- Spend some time in your group reading the *Magnificat* together. What themes do you notice? Are there portions of this prayer you might consider adding to your own prayers this week?



The Good Book Club Bible Study

Week 1: Readings for Group Discussion

LUKE 1:1-4

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

ACTS 1:1-2

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

Programmatic Statements: Luke's Agenda

LUKE 4:16-21

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

ACTS 1:6-8

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

THE SONGS OF HANNAH AND MARY

1 Samuel 2:1-10 (Translation from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, available here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/09-1reigns-nets.pdf>)

And she said,

“My heart was made firm in the Lord;
my horn was exalted in my God;
my mouth was made wide against my enemies;
I was glad in your deliverance,
because there is none holy like the Lord,
and there is none righteous like our God;
there is none holy besides you.

“Boast not, and speak not lofty things;
let not big talking come forth from your mouth,
because the Lord is a god of knowledge,
and a god who prepares his own ways.
The bow of the mighty has become weak,
and weak ones have girded themselves with might;
full of bread they suffered loss,
and the hungry have forsaken the land,
because a barren one has borne seven,
and she who is rich in children became weak
The Lord puts to death and brings to life;
he brings down to Hades and brings up.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, and he raises on high.
He raises up the needy from the ground
and lifts the poor from the dunghill,
to make them sit with the mighty of the peoples
even making them inherit a throne of glory.

“Granting the prayer to the one who prays,
he has even blessed the years of the righteous,
because not by strength is a man mighty.
The Lord will make his adversary weak;
the Lord is holy.
Let not the clever boast in his cleverness,
and let not the mighty boast in his might,
and let not the wealthy boast in his wealth,
but let him who boasts boast in this:
to understand and know the Lord
and to execute justice and righteousness
in the midst of the land.
The Lord ascended to the heavens and thundered.

He will judge earth's ends
and gives strength to our kings
and will exalt the horn of his anointed.

Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”