

# GUIDELINES

**BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY'S  
MINISTRY AND MISSION**

SEP–DEC 2024

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# GUIDELINES

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Ministries

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# Suggestions for using *Guidelines*

Set aside a regular time and place, if possible, when and where you can read and pray undisturbed. Before you begin, take time to be still and, if you find it helpful, use the BRF Ministries prayer on page 6.

In *Guidelines*, the introductory section provides context for the passages or themes to be studied, while the units of comment can be used daily, weekly or whatever best fits your timetable. You will need a Bible (more than one if you want to compare different translations) as Bible passages are not included. Please don't be tempted to skip the Bible reading because you know the passage well. We will have utterly failed if we don't bring our readers into engagement with the word of God. At the end of each week is a 'Guidelines' section, offering further thoughts about, or practical application of, what you have been studying.

Occasionally, you may read something in *Guidelines* that you find particularly challenging, even uncomfortable. This is inevitable in a series of notes which draws on a wide spectrum of contributors and doesn't believe in ducking difficult issues. Indeed, we believe that *Guidelines* readers much prefer thought-provoking material to a bland diet that only confirms what they already think.

If you do disagree with a contributor, you may find it helpful to go through these three steps. First, think about why you feel uncomfortable. Perhaps this is an idea that is new to you, or you are not happy about the way something has been expressed. Or there may be something more substantial – you may feel that the writer is guilty of sweeping generalisation, factual error, or theological or ethical misjudgement. Second, pray that God would use this disagreement to teach you more about his word and about yourself. Third, have a deeper read about the issue. There are further reading suggestions at the end of each writer's block of notes. And then, do feel free to write to the contributor or the editor of *Guidelines*. We welcome communication, by email, phone or letter, as it enables us to discover what has been useful, challenging or infuriating for our readers. We don't always promise to change things, but we will always listen and think about your ideas, complaints or suggestions. Thank you!

To send feedback, please email [enquiries@brf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@brf.org.uk), phone +44 (0)1865 319700 or write to the address shown opposite.

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# The editors write...



This issue of *Guidelines* has been designed to guide and nourish you. We hope that you will enjoy it, and thank you, as ever, for the feedback you've provided on previous issues.

Bill Goodman reaches the end of his epic series on the book of Psalms in this issue. Andrew Boakye also concludes his series on Galatians, taking us from chapter 3 to the end of the book. Isabelle Hamley takes up the mantle for our gospel series, guiding us on 'a journey in discipleship' as we look at Luke 9–16.

Our Old Testament series for this issue are Esther, written by former *Guidelines* editor Helen Payner, and Joshua, written by Leoné Martin. Neither make particularly comfortable reading, but our hope is that both provide you with a deeper understanding of who God is.

In the New Testament, George Wieland helps us with the short books of Titus and Philemon. Olivia Warburton takes us on a whistle-stop tour of New Testament prayers, whetting our appetite for delving deeper into this topic ourselves. Max Kramer helps us to think through the politics of Jesus, and what this means for ourselves as Christians formulating our own political views.

As we journey into Advent, we are in good company. David Spriggs invites us to think about forgiveness, while Elizabeth Dodd invites us to ponder the poetry of the Magnificat: a song of victory, a prophetic poem and a hymn of praise. Meanwhile, Rachel Tranter looks at the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, with examples from Matthew, Ephesians and Revelation. These different types of uses help us to contextualise the Old Testament and understand how the New Testament writers saw the scriptures in light of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Finally, Cally Hammond reflects on how, where and when we find Jesus in the world.

As we journey through the final section of the year towards our Advent celebrations, we hope that these notes continue to draw you closer to the love of God expressed through Jesus.

Rachel

Olivia

## The prayer of BRF Ministries

*Faithful God,  
thank you for growing BRF  
from small beginnings  
into the worldwide family of BRF Ministries.  
We rejoice as young and old  
discover you through your word  
and grow daily in faith and love.  
Keep us humble in your service,  
ambitious for your glory  
and open to new opportunities.  
For your name's sake.  
Amen.*

### Helping to pay it forward

As part of our Living Faith ministry, we're raising funds to give away copies of Bible reading notes and other resources to those who aren't able to access them any other way, working with food banks and chaplaincy services, in prisons, hospitals and care homes.

*'This very generous gift will be hugely appreciated, and truly bless each recipient... Bless you for your kindness.'*

*'We would like to send our enormous thanks to all involved. Your generosity will have a significant impact and will help us to continue to provide support to local people in crisis, and for this we cannot thank you enough.'*

If you've enjoyed and benefited from our resources, would you consider paying it forward to enable others to do so too?

Make a gift at [brf.org.uk/donate](https://brf.org.uk/donate)

# **‘Lord, teach us’: a journey in discipleship through Luke 9—16**



Isabelle Hamley

The phrase ‘Lord, teach us’ encapsulates the middle section of the gospel of Luke. Jesus teaches through word and example, through story and short, pithy sayings, through healings and deliverance, in inviting the disciples to join him and sending them out themselves. As he does so, a picture of discipleship and of the shape of the community that Jesus is gathering gradually emerges. It is a community shaped by the values of the kingdom of God – radical alternative ways of thinking, behaving and relating that nurture the flourishing of all at the expense of none. Jesus’ teaching is challenging: there is much talk of judgement and of the cost of following him. Discipleship is costly, but the alternative is worse over the long run.

Perhaps the most salient aspect of Jesus’ teaching in these eight chapters is the sheer volume of sayings and stories about wealth, and its associated status and power. Wealth is not condemned as intrinsically wrong, though it can be wrongly acquired. However, wealth that is not used for the welfare of all, wealth that does not lead to the blessing of the entire community, can be a burden and a curse to the one who holds it. Similarly, those with status and power are called, again and again, to use it for the benefit of all, whether this is exercised in an economic, political or religious sphere. Jesus is clearly concerned, not just with individuals, but with communities, their lives together and the way in which our daily choices shape the health and flourishing of those around us.

Unless otherwise stated, Bible quotations are taken from the NRSV.



# 1 From guests to hosts

## Luke 9:1-17

Luke loves collapsing paradoxes, challenging embedded ways of thinking which prevent the gospel from taking root among the people of God. Early in chapter 9, Jesus is preparing disciples to become leaders among the people of God and sends out the twelve. We need to read the stories of the sending out and the feeding of the five thousand together if we want to get the gist of what Jesus is teaching future leaders of the church and all disciples.

The twelve are sent out with power – over all demons and to cure diseases. Yet at the same time, they are told to take nothing with them, and ‘nothing’ is emphasised by being placed right at the beginning of Jesus’ instructions in Greek. Alongside immense power, the disciples are placed in a position of immense vulnerability, utterly dependent on the kindness of strangers. Mission is set up right from the start as a cooperative enterprise, where ‘missionaries’ are guests among others. This inevitably shapes how the gospel is preached and healing offered. Power dynamics are evened out, mutual respect and care required. Mission includes both proclamation and healing/deliverance. The gospel is for the whole person. Bodies matter in the landscape of the kingdom of God, and Jesus gives no mandate for separating a spiritual gospel from a social gospel. The gospel call is all-encompassing; it demands that we engage the whole person and collapse, rather than build, any divide between the sacred and the secular, between what belongs to spirituality and what does not. Everything is affected by the gospel.

And then... Jesus turns the tables. Those who were guests now become co-hosts with him as he feeds the crowd. Jesus again models holding teaching and feeding together, caring for bodies and souls together. From the scarcity of the disciples’ sending out with ‘nothing’, we move to the sheer overabundance of the kingdom and twelve baskets of leftovers. The disciples, who had gone out to teach, a traditional male role with status, now serve food, a role usually reserved for women and slaves.

Leaders and disciples of Jesus are called to an integrity of life that does not seek status or raw power, but holds out the gospel as gift, models vulnerability and serves the people through teaching and service, by being guests as much as being hosts.

## 2 He is not who you think he is

**Luke 9:18–45**

‘Who do you say that I am?’ is one of the most famous questions of the gospel. Who is this Jesus? Jesus probes the disciples’ understanding and does not let them rely on hearsay and the words of others. He first asks, what do the crowds say? But this is not enough. Knowing *of* Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus. Rumours of God are not the same as encounter with God. Yet Jesus takes the disciples further. How do we discern who Jesus is, and where Jesus is at work? This is a crucial question for those of us reading at a distance. We no longer have the benefit of walking with Jesus physically, daily. We are dependent on the testimony of others, and on other disciples teaching us to recognise Jesus around us and at work in our own lives.

This passage helps by telling us that Jesus is rarely where and who we want him to be. Yes, Jesus is the Jesus of the transfiguration, on a mountain, shining brightly. This Jesus may be easy to recognise – or is he? It is not a coincidence that Jesus’ teaching on suffering comes before the transfiguration. It is easy to look for God on the mountaintops, in exciting places, in amazing experiences that transcend everything we know. These experiences are few and far between, and they carry danger with them: the danger of thinking that God is in the shiny, amazing places of the world, that God is found in places of power and glory, and that it is through these experiences that we meet with God.

The drift of this passage is the exact opposite. The Messiah ‘must undergo great suffering’, ‘be rejected’ and ‘killed’ (v. 22) before he is finally ‘raised’. The danger is that we look for the resurrection without going through the cross, aim for glory without vulnerability, power without weakness. Instead, Jesus teaches that the way to God is found through the cross first, in unexpected places and in unexpected ways. Just as with the birth narratives, Jesus’ presence is often hidden in places we overlook, because we look for glory and palaces rather than humility in small towns and crowded family rooms, as in Bethlehem. Jesus will often be found at work in these modest places, and we recognise Jesus’ followers, not by their glory, but the fact that they, too, ‘take up their cross’, and follow him.

### 3 Did you really listen?

#### Luke 9:46–62

When the disciples were sent out at the beginning of chapter 9, they were given enormous power – and taught that this power needed exercising alongside the vulnerability and humility of taking ‘nothing’ with them, and depending on the generosity of others. Jesus then teaches them about the cost of discipleship. Did they really listen? Did they simply not understand?

Here, only a little later, we find the disciples preoccupied with power and glory, more than ready to misuse the immense responsibility entrusted them. They fight over who is the greatest, as if they had not been taught to serve at tables like the least. They want to stop someone else casting out demons in the name of Jesus, as if power granted to others threatens their own, and forgetting that deliverance is characteristic of God’s own work. They seem to think that the gospel is their private property. When they go through a Samaritan village and are not welcome, they want to use the power of God not for healing, deliverance or proclamation, but only to destroy, rather than simply ‘shake the dust off their feet’ as they had been commanded (9:5).

Learning how to use power well is difficult, and learning that God is not found primarily in great displays of power is even harder. Jesus has to remind them again, and again, and again.

The disciples struggle to put Jesus, rather than themselves, at the centre. By putting Jesus at the centre, their gaze would actually be directed outward, towards the healing and deliverance of the world around them. Putting Jesus at the centre would also achieve something quite different in terms of relationships between the disciples. In the first subsection (vv. 46–48), they compete with one another, rather than seeking to serve and work together. In the second subsection (vv. 49–50), they seek to undermine the work of someone who also follows Jesus, thereby bringing fragmentation and competition between different groups of disciples. Bringing disunity within the body, treating other believers as if they do not really belong because they operate slightly differently, is something that will occupy much of the letters of Paul. Human tribes and factions here get in the way of the gospel, and Jesus firmly stands against them, and returns to teaching about how to follow him truly (vv. 57–62).

## 4 Expanding the imagination

### Luke 10:1–24

Here, Luke tells a story remarkably similar to the one that opened chapter 9: the sending out of the 72, with instructions similar to those given to the twelve, but expanded. The progress of the narrative through Luke and Acts shows how ever-widening circles of disciples are brought into the proclamation of the kingdom of God. The story is darker here than in chapter 9. Following the disciples' struggles to understand the message, and rejection in Samaria, the themes of rejection and judgement take on more prominence. The challenge of the gospel and the cost of discipleship become embodied in the reality of conflict.

In today's world, churches in decline often try to make the gospel more attractive or see rejection as a sign of failure on their part. This passage in Luke, however, reminds us that rejection was the experience of Jesus and of early disciples, because the gospel is good news, but it is not easy. The demands of the gospel are obvious in the instructions to the 72. They are to go out with no purse, no bag and no sandals (v. 4). In other words, no containers for worldly goods, and no sign of wealth. It is an instruction to operate outside of economic norms of service and payment, and outside of the norms of sensible, prudent provision ahead of journeys. It is a call back to the desert in Exodus, when Israel was led by God into a place of utter scarcity and asked to trust in God's provision. This kind of instruction demands a radical shift of the imagination, the ability to imagine that different ways to live and to relate are possible. It demands trust, and the belief that human life and survival are essentially relational, rather than based on individual planning and provision-making. Obliquely, it is a challenge to the economic thinking of the Roman Empire, and every other system that has sought the accumulation of riches as a marker of success.

Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is ruled by different principles – abundance, faith, trust and generosity – which are neither naïve, nor a pipe dream. But this is hard teaching, and the disciples are not always welcome.

And yet, whether they are met with peace and welcome, or rejection, the message, and the invitation, are the same: the kingdom of God is near.

## 5 Who is my neighbour?

### Luke 10:25–42

The good Samaritan is perhaps the best-known of all of Jesus' parables. The term has made it into everyday language. Familiarity can mean we miss its shock value, and its more subtle challenges. We know about the animosity between Jews and Samaritans, a rivalry that clearly went both ways. Here, the story challenges the caricaturing of the 'other' – and of the self.

This is not a new theme. The Old Testament tells of times when Israel thinks that Israelites are the only safe people to be with, while denigrating the inhabitants of the land (e.g. Judges 19). The assumption is then often proved wrong with Israelite turning against Israelite. One of the subtexts of these stories, and of this parable, is that belonging to a group does not guarantee that the group will care for you. And simply belonging to an 'other' group does not guarantee that a person will behave according to our worst predictions. The story challenges the building of prejudice and discrimination based on nothing more than identity; it also challenges the idea that 'my group' is necessarily better or holier. It is a good parable for the digital age of echo chambers and culture wars.

Jesus challenges his listeners to expand their imagination, unlearn destructive ways shaped by culture and daily life, and trust that things could be different. Here, he challenges the instinct to fear the stranger. Again, this is not new. The Old Testament commands repeatedly to care for 'the widow, the orphan and the stranger' (Deuteronomy 10:18), and to 'love [our] neighbour' (Leviticus 19:18). Love is easy when it is only a concept, when it is not tied to fear, a sense of threat, uncertainty, or to risk and loss for ourselves. By telling this story, Jesus puts flesh on the bones of the command to love, and shows its cost – and its reward. We often imagine ourselves as the Samaritan in the story, told to go and love, but the audience was Jewish: the person they are invited to identify with is not first the Samaritan, but the injured man. The Jewish man is hurt, and loved by his neighbour – the fearsome, strange, despised Samaritan. The parable suggests that loving our neighbour is a two-way street, where our capacity to love can only grow as we accept the gift of the stranger.

## 6 Teach us to pray

### Luke 11:1-13

In Luke's sequence of teaching on discipleship, it is logical to incorporate a section on how to pray. The disciples' question is interesting – 'teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'. What were they thinking? Are there right and wrong ways to pray? Would John have taught a different technique? There is a fine line between being open to teaching, exploring and expanding spirituality, and thinking that there is a failsafe trick to our spiritual disciplines, that if we do it the right way, it works. Jesus gives three sets of teaching on prayer. Together, they remind us that prayer is not a formula but, first and foremost, about who we pray to: God, who loves us as a parent loves a child, and who will only give us good things.

Jesus' form of words is instructive. Instead of going for something different, it digs deep into the stories and practices of Israel. God is 'our father' in the same way that Israel is God's child in the Old Testament – it is a collective identity which speaks of love and closeness, and of a call to live as God does. Yet in the same breath as God is an intimate and close parent, he is also 'in heaven' and 'hallowed'. The hallowing of God's name sets a distance between humans and God, and reminds us that God is immeasurably greater than we are, in power and holiness. Holding together closeness and distance, intimacy and reverence, is the challenge here, one that reflects a paradox expressed in the words of Isaiah (e.g. 40:10-11) or Hosea (e.g. 6:1). God is also king, as God is king throughout the Old Testament, despite human kings who often try and usurp God's true kingship.

The daily bread line harks back to manna in the desert and God's command to only take enough for the day ahead and not hoard for tomorrow bread that belongs to another's today. Forgiveness directs our eyes to the One who forgives – the God who, in the Old Testament, is characterised as 'a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Exodus 34:6-7).

Jesus' teaching on prayer, first and foremost, directs the disciple towards God and his faithfulness throughout Israel's history.

## Guidelines

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Jesus is shaping a people as he travels with the disciples, teaches the crowds and comes into conversation with religious and secular leaders. His questions and teaching constantly challenge the disciples to ask – did you really listen? Do you really understand what this means? How far does Jesus' teaching really penetrate our thought patterns, our habits and our character?

Are we willing to be guests and hosts, to share our wealth and offer hospitality? And are we willing to make ourselves vulnerable as guests in others' homes – in workplaces, in secular institutions, with those of other faiths, sharing the gospel and peace graciously and respectfully, and accepting what the other has to offer and teach us?

Jesus' most salient challenge is, perhaps, the less obvious one: the challenge to let our imaginations be transformed by a picture of the kingdom that is so alien, so different from our ways of living and structuring our communities, that it completely disrupts our expectations about relationships, money and possessions and the degree to which we trust God for all we need.

A unique Bible reading resource offering in-depth study notes written by a diverse contributor team, *Guidelines* is the perfect tool to help you interpret and apply the biblical text confidently in your context. Each issue covers four months and is structured in weekly units, broken into six sections, with an introduction giving context and a final application section.

'I find *Guidelines* so helpful, full of insight and depth. The challenges are also helpful, and looking outside the box of a particular stance is so refreshing.'

'Our thanks for making us think things through.'

'I feel I must write to say how much help, support and encouragement we have felt from the recent contributors. Many thanks to all concerned.'



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