



**BELIEVE
IN GOOD**

DEVOTIONAL SERIES

Introduction

This four-part series explores The Salvation Army's message of 'Believe in good' as found in Scripture and contains questions prompting reflection and application. It is suitable for personal devotions, small group studies, or can be expanded upon for a more formal worship gathering and discussion.

Contents

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'BELIEVE IN GOOD' – THE RADICAL GOOD

Jesus tells a story of a time when Jewish and Samaritan people had nothing to do with one another. Worse, they had a history of conflict and tension. Today, it would be like telling a group of Ukrainians a story where a Russian was the hero who stopped to care for an injured Ukrainian, and not the two Ukrainian characters. Or during WWII, telling Australians a story where a Japanese man was the kind hero and not the two Australians.

Here, a Jewish leader asks Jesus a question about how to live a good and full life – and Jesus reminds him of a passage in the Hebrew Scriptures.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,” and, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

Then he tells the story of a Samaritan who showed extraordinary love for a Jewish man – and two Jewish religious leaders who did not. The Jewish expert in the law was not expecting this. This was a shocking story. Read the passage from Luke 10:25–37 below.

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”



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List the radical 'good' that the Samaritan showed in this story? Why would this have been a shocking story for the original hearers?

When have you experienced or seen someone who has shown radical good and generosity?

Why might the religious leaders (the priest and the Levite), have passed by the injured man? What stops you from showing radical good and generosity to another?

When we follow Jesus, he calls us to live a good life – in a radical way. Jesus challenges us, *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you ... And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that,” (Luke 6:27, 33).*

Jesus doesn't just talk the talk, he walks the walk. He demonstrates his love for us in the way he lived and died for us on the cross. This is the radical good of the Creator of the Universe coming into the world as a human and allowing himself to be crucified – so that we might live.

Poem by Reverend John Newton (author *Amazing Grace*)

How kind the good Samaritan
To him who fell among the thieves!
Thus Jesus pities fallen man,
And heals the wounds the soul receives.

I remember well the day,
When sorely wounded, nearly slain;
Like that poor man I bleeding lay,
And groaned for help, but groaned in vain.

Men saw me in this helpless case,
And passed without compassion by;
Each neighbour turned away his face,
Unmoved by my mournful cry.

But he whose name had been my scorn,
As Jews Samaritans despise
Came, when he saw me thus forlorn,
With love and pity in his eyes.

Gently he raised me from the ground,
Pressed me to lean upon his arm;
And into every gaping wound
He poured his own all-healing balm.

Unto his church my steps he led,
The house prepared for sinners lost;
Gave charge I should be clothed and fed;
And took upon him all the cost.

Thus saved from death, from want secured,
I wait till he again shall come,
When I shall be completely cured
And take me to his heavenly home.

There through eternal boundless days,
When nature's wheel no longer rolls,
How shall I love, adore, and praise,
This good Samaritan to souls!



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'BELIEVE IN GOOD' – THE GOOD NEWS

Early during his time in ministry, Jesus went to his hometown of Nazareth, where he preached a message of “good news to the poor”. What is so good about Jesus and his message? And if it is so good, why do people think he’s out of his mind and want to kill him?

In the following passage in Luke 4:14-21 and 42-44, he sums up his purpose for coming into the world to proclaim the “good news”.

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to **proclaim good news to the poor.***

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,*

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing . . .”

*42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. 43 But he said, “I must **proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God** to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” 44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*

Who was the good news for?

What do you think is the ‘Good News of the Kingdom of God’ that Jesus wanted to share?



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Jesus continually surprised people by spending time with people who were rejected, powerless and on the edge of the Roman and Jewish communities – people who were disabled, sick, poor, and women. He ate and drank with people who found life tough. He was drawn to people who were struggling in life.

While some people thought Jesus was sharing “good news,” others did not. Some thought he was demon possessed (Mark 3:22) and others thought he was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21). In Luke 4, “all the people in the synagogue were furious ... They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill ... in order to throw him down the cliff,” (Luke 4:28-29).

Why do you think Jesus could cause such division? Who or what did he challenge?

Choose **five** of the following statements which you think are the Good News of the Kingdom of God? Why do you think Jesus wants people to understand these five things?

- » All people are made in the image of God.
- » Christ has a new set of religious rules and duties for people.
- » God has come as a human being to show his love for the world.
- » Christ has come to bring healing to relationships with God and others.
- » God offers forgiveness for the past and hope for the future.
- » God does not care about people or the world.
- » Christ has come to set people free from fear and anxiety so that they can love.
- » The Kingdom of God is only for good people.

Prayer

Our Father in Heaven
Holy is your name
Your Kingdom come here on Earth, as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
And deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.
Now and forever, Amen.



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'BELIEVE IN GOOD' – THE GOD WHO IS GOOD

Australians know about looking after sheep. It can be hard, tiring and responsible work.

However, unlike Australian shepherds who drive the sheep, often using a sheep dog, shepherds in the Middle East lead their flocks. They use their voice to call them on. The sheep follow because they know the shepherd's voice.

In John's Gospel, Jesus says he is like a good shepherd. He contrasts himself to other leaders, who are like 'thieves and robbers' or a 'hired hand' (John 10:7-18).

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

What makes Jesus the 'Good Shepherd'?

"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (v. 10). What does a full or abundant life look like for you?

Advertising, politicians and social media are some of the voices that call people today. How can those voices be different to the voice of Jesus?

Read aloud the following verses from the Book of Psalms:

*"For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations," (Psalm 100:5).*

*"Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him," (Psalm 34:8).*

*"Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever," (Psalm 106:1).*



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A recurring theme across the Scriptures is that God is good. At the same time, the psalm writers, including King David, had the following experiences ...

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me? (Psalm 13:1-2)*

People look at the suffering and pain in the world and wonder if there is a God. And if there is a God, how can he be good when there is so much pain and suffering?

What can cause people to question God's goodness – and wonder whether God really is good?

In the midst of pain and suffering, we need a friend. We need to know that we are not alone – and to feel the comfort of knowing we are loved. We need to know we have a God who knows the pain of our world.

“Life in all its fullness is not life without tears but life with the one who dries our tears and moves us onward to fresh pastures,” (John Swinton).

This is Jesus, the good God, who has given his life and taken it up again. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who has entered death and defeated it in his resurrection. He is good and his love endures forever.

Prayer

Lord, you are good and your love endures forever;
your faithfulness continues through all generations.

Help me to taste and see that the Lord is good;
that I may take refuge in you.

I praise you and give thanks for you are good and have defeated evil
help me to remember that your love endures forever.

In the pain and tears of life, help me to remember that you are good
and that you will dry my tears and move me on to fresh pastures.



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'BELIEVE IN GOOD' – WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

What does 'the good' look like? Micah, a prophet in the Hebrew Scriptures, tells us:

*"He has shown you, O mortal, **what is good**. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God," (Micah 6:8).*

Here are three examples of what 'the good' looks like and there are many more.

1. Others are important, so I will give generously – like Jesus.

The Bible shows the human world as an interrelated community. To follow God is to live in such a way that the community is strengthened – to use our gifts, money and resources for the sake of the wider community and wellbeing of all. All the world belongs to God, so our money and wealth are a gift for us to use well. Jesus gives up everything for the sake of the poor and the helpless – us!

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich," (2 Corinthians 8:9).

2. Everyone is made in the image of God, so I will welcome people with dignity – like Jesus.

All people are made in the image of God, so all people are to be welcomed and treated with worth and dignity. To show preference for some people because of their status, wealth or ethnicity would be unjust. Bribery is unjust because it does not treat the poor the same as it does the wealthy. Any system of justice, government or business in which decisions or outcomes are determined by how much money parties have is a stench before God.

Martin Luther King Jr. and the leaders of the civil rights movement understood that African Americans were not treated equally in the USA. They led others to see this and to change the law. Aboriginal Christian leaders like William Cooper and Pastor Douglas Nicholls spoke against the injustice facing First Nations peoples in Australia. They led others to see this and to change the law giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders the vote.

3. God's people have a special concern for the poor and the marginalised – like Jesus.

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves ... Defend the rights of the poor and needy," (Proverbs 31:8-9).

The Bible doesn't say, 'speak up for the rich and powerful.' This is not because they are less important as persons before God, but because they don't need others to do this for them. The playing field is not level and if we don't advocate for the poor there will not be equality – or fairness or justice.



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William Booth understood that the urban poor in England were not being cared for and The Salvation Army began to care for the whole person. The Salvos spoke against the injustice of children working in dangerous factories and shared the love of Jesus with them; giving people food for their stomachs and food for their souls.

What are some other ways that we can “act justly, love mercy and walk humbly” with God?

How have you seen others “act justly, love mercy and walk humbly” with God?

Prayer

God, we thank you that you have shown us what is good. We pray for your people in our country.

We pray that you would help us to lead the way in acting with justice. Show us each day how to speak up for the vulnerable in our world – for those in prison; for the unemployed; for those with mental illness; and for those who are refugees and seeking asylum.

We ask that we reflect Jesus in the way we speak and act.

Help us to show loving kindness to the people we meet each day – to our family and neighbours – and to those we meet as strangers on the street.

Lead us in the way of walking humbly with you — with prayer and compassion for one another and with a longing for the day when your justice will run like a river.



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