

Equip Women to Teach the Word

Prepare To Be Faithful



*Find the complete module resources at
welscongregationalservices.net/equip-women-to-teach*



Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the collective work of WELS Women's Ministry (WWM) Committee, commissioned to pool their substantial experience, spiritual maturity, and wisdom toward equipping women to share God's Word with others. In particular, I'm grateful for the hard work of the following contributors: Rachel and Wayne Halldorson, Ben Kratz, Katie Martin, Marilyn Miller, Dan and Naomi Schmidt, Dawn Schulz, Paula Sulzle, Amber Albee Swenson, Sally Valleskey, Kathie Wendland, and Paul Wendland.

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May "Equip Women to Teach the Word" help churches prepare women to confidently and faithfully share God's Word in different ministry settings. May God bless your use of this training guide to carry out your church's ministry!

Donn Dobberstein,
Director, WELS Discipleship

How to Use This Training

Equip Women to Teach the Word

This unique, Christ-centered training has several remarkable features designed to reach every learning style and level of learner.

Your Bible is the actual textbook. Open your Bible. This study guides you through Scripture and points you to Christ in the Word. *All the Scripture verses are in italics.*

The training workbook should be studied as you work through the lessons.

- An exceptional feature of this training is the firm foundation in Lessons 1 and 2. Read these lessons regularly—for example, set a goal of six times in six months.
- Take notes as you work through the training. Write down key words, definitions and concepts so they will have a lasting impression.
- There are activities at the end of each section that are intentionally designed for you to practice the skills you just learned. Don't skip them.
- Lessons 1-5 are the training lessons. Lessons 6-9 are areas of life and ministry where women put the training into practice.

Video presentations accompany Lessons 1-5. These videos will give you an opportunity to hear other believers talk about the important truths of Scripture. The clips have been professionally edited to add powerful bursts of video that enrich the reading and activities.

The video clips are available at:

www.welscongregationalservices.net/equip-women-to-teach

The supplemental material is outstanding. Don't miss the glossary, appendix, links, and more. Keep looking—you'll be amazed!



The STOP sign boxes contain critical information—learn those truths.



The INFORMATION boxes contain information that is helpful.



The NOTES sections are included for you to write important concepts.



The ACTIVITIES will help you put what you’ve learned into practice.

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Equip Women to Teach the Word

Excitement and fear come when you anticipate something new or important.

The possibility or anticipation of teaching God's Word might make your heart race a little. Whether teaching Scripture is new to you or not, it is certainly important. Actually, nothing could be more important.

The overwhelming responsibility is hard to grasp. You can't get your head around the enormity of the privilege and you have no idea how to start or where to begin. Every step is important, the path is narrow and the journey takes dedication. It can be paralyzing as you struggle to put one foot in front of another.

But there is hope—and it is here.

What Is Equip Women to Teach the Word?

Equip Women to Teach the Word takes you by the hand and walks with you on the path to faithful teaching. Pastors, professors and experienced Bible study teachers will prepare you to teach the Word of God in an organized, step-by-step process. This training prepares you to be faithful. It instills confidence as it anchors you in the Word of God with the support of pastors, teachers, and reliable resources.

Why Equip Women to Teach the Word?

You need Equip Women to Teach the Word because you need to be instructed and prepared to faithfully teach Scripture.

This training is designed for mature Christian women who want to follow Paul's directive in Titus 2:3, "*to teach what is good.*" It is rich with guidance for women who are thriving in faith and want to talk about the Word of God. It prepares women to teach in a variety of settings with the support and encouragement of pastors and congregations. It provides the training needed to share the Word of God correctly and humbly—but also with confidence.

For pastors, this material fills a gap when women are well-suited and eager to teach the Word but need additional training. Pastors know what has to happen before Bible study begins and they understand the importance of solid training. This module presents a broad spectrum of scholarly insights in a simple format—it guides women to understand the responsibilities, preparations, and tasks needed to teach God's Word faithfully.

Who will want this?

- The woman who wants to be well prepared to teach the Word.
- The woman who wants to get better at teaching the Word.
- The woman who wants to stand firm on the Word despite the influence of the world that surrounds her.
- The pastor who wants to prepare and provide solid training for women who teach the Word.
- The pastor who wants to encourage and strengthen women in their faith and keep them faithful to the Word.
- The pastor who wants to provide redirection and additional training for a woman who is struggling as she teaches the Word of God.

How Is Equip Women to Teach the Word Different?

Equip Women to Teach the Word follows the footsteps given in Scripture. It clears away distractions and simply points to God's plan for sharing the Word. This training isn't merely philosophical or encouraging. Women will grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture as they work through this training and complete the tasks.

- This isn't a to-do list with an obligation of duties to check off as you go. This is Gospel-motivated instruction that inspires you to grow in your own spiritual understanding and desire that growth for others.
- Teachers must sit at the feet of Jesus to become learners before they can lead others. This training provides instruction for spiritual growth, guidance for effective teaching and life as an ambassador of Christ.
- This training reinforces learning Scripture as a life-long process. It sets the pattern and puts the tools in your hand to keep growing.
- Rather than overwhelming learners, this training continually builds understanding and growth at a sustainable pace.
- As a vital and effective training tool it can be integrated across all platforms of ministry.
- This training yokes the pastor and lay-teacher together in a partnership of ministry that serves and blesses the congregation.
- This training explains why each step is important. It guides women into lives of enduring service because they know why they follow the pattern.

What Will You Get with Equip Women to Teach the Word?

What are your biggest concerns or worries?

- ✓ I would like to do this, but I don't know how to get started.
- ✓ I would like to do this, but don't feel confident. Is there some place to find answers?
- ✓ I want to be well prepared to teach the Word and speak the truth.
- ✓ I want to be able to answer questions correctly and clearly.
- ✓ I want to teach God's Word in the proper context.
- ✓ I want to be clear about the big picture and whole counsel of God.
- ✓ I want to be a faithful teacher that understands the responsibilities of teaching the Word.
- ✓ I want to make sure my teaching builds others up and never hurts the faith of others.

What are the biggest challenges you have with those areas?

- ✓ I'm not sure how to teach and communicate clearly so participants aren't confused.
- ✓ I don't know where to find the resources I need to learn and prepare.
- ✓ I don't have enough time to prepare so I can teach well.
- ✓ My limited preparation time limits my ability to reach various types of learners.
- ✓ I don't know if I will teach doctrine correctly.
- ✓ I don't know if I will be able to recognize and address false doctrine.
- ✓ I want to be well equipped but my pastor doesn't have the time or resources to thoroughly train me.
- ✓ I don't understand the needs and background of those who participate in Bible study, so I am less effective in teaching them.
- ✓ I want to make sure I clearly see what is influencing me.

What problems do these challenges cause?

- ✓ I have a lot of self-doubt which leads me to be self-focused—it robs me of joy and confidence.
- ✓ Preparing to teach the Word is time consuming and exhausting—I get tired and want to quit when it gets difficult.
- ✓ I wonder if I should find other opportunities to serve.
- ✓ I don't have a place to use my gifts.
- ✓ I know women are looking for opportunities to grow in the Word but I don't know if I can teach.
- ✓ I know my Bible study teaching can be shallow and sometimes lacks depth.
- ✓ I feel like my Bible study group is drifting and becoming an isolated group.
- ✓ I have frustrations in serving and sometimes experience difficulty working with my pastor.

Many women are eager to grow in the Word and their love of Scripture often leads them to share it with others. But it is difficult to find the balance of knowing Scripture well enough to teach—yet not wanting to jump in too soon and be unprepared. Where is the narrow middle road?

Right here.

Women do need training and instruction to faithfully teach God's Word. They need to know what they need to know. They need to know why they need to know it. They need to be well grounded in Scripture and be familiar with the basic truths and big picture of God's Word.

Women also need to be assured that God wants to use their gifts to bless the church. They need to be prompted and encouraged to trust the Word and simply be a joyful vessel of truth. They need to know they are needed. They need to know why God has created them with gifts and called them to serve.

This training will light the path from every angle.

Every light and every step will point to Christ.

What's your ideal outcome?

- ✓ I will have more confidence that Bible study is God's work and I will trust the Spirit as he does his work through the Word.
- ✓ My teaching will be faithful, thought-provoking, and have engaging discussion questions.
- ✓ My Bible study group will have a strong connection to our pastor and congregation.
- ✓ I will flourish under my pastor's leadership and he will be blessed by my service.
- ✓ I will be motivated by the Gospel and energized by the Holy Spirit. I will be strengthened for service.
- ✓ I will understand my spiritual gifts and have discernment in seeing the best way to use my gifts in service.
- ✓ Women will have another opportunity to grow in the Word of God and enjoy fellowship with other believers.
- ✓ I will be thoroughly equipped by my pastor as he uses this resource to train me.
- ✓ I will spend less time looking for solid resources and will find them more easily.
- ✓ I will confidently choose good Bible study material because my skills of discernment will improve.
- ✓ I will know God's Word better.
- ✓ My time learning God's Word will strengthen my faith and influence families for Christ. The ripples of spiritual growth will extend to build up groups, congregations, and even society.
- ✓ I will grow in my hunger and desire for the Word.
- ✓ I will be amazed at God's grace and compelled by his love to be his ambassador.
- ✓ I will be better equipped with the Word as I speak extemporaneously, answer questions and respond to comments.
- ✓ I will be equipped to use the sword of the Spirit and make better decisions about whether to use law or gospel.

What would getting that outcome do for you?

- ✓ Bring me joy in the partnership of the gospel.
- ✓ Give glory to God.
- ✓ Allow me to serve in building God's kingdom with faithfulness.
- ✓ Give me a clear purpose and grasp of how to use my gifts.
- ✓ Gain confidence and contentment knowing this is God's work.
- ✓ Enable me to balance the weight of responsibility with confidence in the priesthood of all believers.
- ✓ Bring me fellowship with believers and opportunities to create new friendships.
- ✓ Give me the ability to engage in continued ministry opportunities.
- ✓ Heighten my understanding of others, be sensitive to their needs and have the wisdom to know what Scripture to share with them.
- ✓ Strengthen me to lead, nurture, and encourage other women.

By the End of This Program, You Will Be Able To . . .

- See the overarching picture of God's redeeming love in Scripture.
- Regularly study Scripture as part of a strong devotional life.
- Treasure the blessings of the church and esteem the Word and sacraments.
- Pray with deep devotion, enriched by Christ-centered resources.
- Examine Scripture as the standard for thoughts, words, and actions.
- Serve and bless others with gifts that build God's kingdom.
- Understand and be aware of women's varying needs and perspectives.
- Respect pastors and appreciate their leadership and calling.
- Evaluate Bible study material with better discernment.
- Prepare and plan Bible study with excellence.
- Faithfully teach the Word effectively with skills that continue to improve.

The Program

God's women are hungry for his Word.

The world's empty messages cannot satisfy the void in human hearts. But Christ fills the emptiness with love and grace. When believers have tasted the goodness of God and feasted on his rich truth, they return to the Word again and again.

You desire the spiritual growth that comes by studying Scripture, and you see opportunities to nurture and encourage others with the Word. But can you be equipped to faithfully teach others and fill hungry souls with the Word of God?

Yes.

Equip Women to Teach the Word is written for those who desire to faithfully teach God's Word.

With a high and holy view of Scripture as the inerrant Word of God, this training will shape your teaching to flow from the Bible with truth and purity. Learn with your pastor's guidance and grow with other believers as you mine the depths of Scripture. Develop your study skills and enhance your teaching ability with instruction from pastors, professors, and experienced Bible study teachers.

Consider the challenges, concerns or uncertainty you face as a Bible study teacher. Perhaps you don't know what you need to learn but you likely know what specific problems you'd like to address. Think about what you want to get out of this training. Pray for wisdom and an open heart to learn with humility.

The Top-Three List

Take two minutes and write down the top three things you want to get out of this training. Put a star next to the one that is most important to you.

1.

2.

3.

Lesson 1: Stand Secure in Grace and Truth



Looking for God's Love Story

Hear God's Redemptive Love Story

Grow In the Word

Embrace the Blessings of the Church

Introduction

"We love because God first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

God's love for you, demonstrated in the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the great love story of Scripture. Your Savior redeemed you with his holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death. Now the Lord gives you his living, enduring Word to keep you close to him—and through those words he teaches you about himself and points to his work of salvation again and again.

God’s grace compels you to listen to everything he says with humble reverence. By the power of the Spirit you have *“accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you”* (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Scripture is your greatest treasure, and the wealth of it runs through your fingers. You search its gems and marvel at each brilliant truth that reflects his redemptive love story.

This training will help you know, live, and teach the love story.

HEAR GOD’S REDEMPITIVE LOVE STORY

Many people have heard stories from “Antiques Road Show” about someone who has no idea that an item from their closet is a priceless treasure. Other times, people think their antique gadget is a valuable thing-a-ma-bob—when actually it did something completely different and is worthless. Experts are a blessing as they open your eyes to what is true and give value to what is important.

Know the Importance of God’s Love Story

In the same way, God has called pastors to esteem and explain the precious gift of Scripture. To some, the wealth of God’s Word is like a priceless treasure whose value is forgotten or taken for granted. But faith is renewed and enriched as instructors point to the message and truths of Scripture. You will be delighted to hear God’s loving plan of salvation in Christ.

Prof. Paul Wendland warns that if you look in Scripture for something you want to hear, you will likely find it. He says, “it is easy to find what you are looking for but it is hardest to find what is there ... You have to know what you are looking for and listening to.” This training turns your focus from what you want to hear and points you to what God wants you to know.

The Bible isn’t a practical guide for life or a checklist to make sure your life is good enough. It isn’t a “how to” book so you can become a spiritually transcendent being or god. This isn’t a book about religion. You are not reading about God—you are meeting him. This is where he reveals himself to you.

Some people approach Scripture thinking they can decide for themselves what God is saying. People like to determine their own truth and create their own love stories. But when they ignore God’s message of grace in Christ they have no hope for eternal life. This is God’s love story. He wrote it. He is love.

Scripture isn’t given for us to figure out why something happened—or didn’t happen. When there are tragedies or catastrophes in life, people expect that Scripture will explain why such things happened. Time and time again, the world

asks, "What is God doing about all these problems?" Sinful man accuses God of being weak or uncaring. They ask, "Where is God?"

And what is God's response?

His response is seen on Calvary where his only Son is beaten and tormented for sin. Crucified and forsaken by God, Christ bears the punishment for the sins of every person. This is where you find God. This is his sacrifice to redeem you. It is the payment that brings eternal life with him—the eternal God made flesh to bear your sin.



Where Do You Find God?

You find God at the cross.

The great God who made the universe is found at the cross where his plan of salvation is made complete. Christ joins our weakness and pain—he carries every burden of humanity. The Savior bears the weight of the sins of the world. This is where you find God.

At that place, where he seems weak or unreal, is where he is most powerfully present. Look in the face of his suffering and ask, "Why?"



Luther's Explanation and Response to the Love Story

Reflect on Luther's explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed with renewed appreciation. Read the words as your personal response to God's Redeeming Love Story.

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.

This is most certainly true."

Treasure the Big Picture of Scripture

Knowing the incredible value of God’s salvation unveiled in Scripture, we tremble at the gift in our hands. We hold inspired words—they are Spirit breathed words that open the door to heaven. But God calls you to not be afraid. He invites you to open the pages and meet him again and again.

You begin learning Scripture by knowing it is the inerrant Word of God. There are no errors in the Bible. But you, like many, may be intimidated by Scripture—or perhaps a bit overwhelmed at the magnitude and holiness of God’s Word. Have you almost felt lost in his vast ocean of truth?

Yes, everyone has felt this way.

While you have confidence that what you read is true—it can also be scary because you don’t want to mess it up. Have you ever studied a passage and realized how much you didn’t know? Or wondered if you’re focused on the right thing? Is it possible that you’re not getting anything out of your reading? How can you really know what it means?

Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. ³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:30-31)

You are not alone.

The Holy Spirit will guide you as you search the Scriptures and seek his truth. Pastors and teachers delight in explaining the Word to others—your brothers and sisters in Christ also encourage you along the way. This training serves as a map that points to the path of Scripture, it helps you see the big picture and get your bearings. It helps you see where you are going.



What is the “Big Picture?”

“When you come to the Scriptures, what you are looking for is a seeking God who wants to reach people and bring them into his kingdom forever. We are tracing the arch of that story as it works its way through history. We’re looking for a love story where God comes to us and presents himself to us.” —Prof. Paul Wendland

There is an old saying, “you can’t see the forest for the trees.” Of course the idea is that if you are standing in the middle of the forest looking at tree bark and pine needles you lose sight of the forest. You miss the big picture.

If the Bible is a forest, its name is “God’s Loving Plan of Salvation in Christ.” This is the great revelation and treasure to be searched. Journey deep in the forest

and linger in its richness and tiny treasures—but never forget where you are. You are in the place where the Lord reveals himself as the God who *“so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).



Studying Pine Needles and Tree Bark

When you learn about pine needles or tree bark in the middle of the forest, you understand them clearly. It is easy to see how they benefit the forest, what makes them grow and the intricate way all the pieces fit together for a healthy forest.

When you study Scripture, remember you are meeting God and learning about his saving love for you in Christ. As you understand the context of God’s redeeming love story and see the pieces fit together you have a stronger, clearer picture of Scripture—and God.

Once the big picture is clear and the rich foliage of the forest is familiar, you will notice if things don’t belong or fit in. In the same way, when you learn Scripture and know it well, you will see what doesn’t fit in. Ideas, philosophies or the comments of others may contradict or undermine Scripture. False teaching will stick out because you are so familiar with the truth.

The world doesn’t even know what truth is—but your ability to discern truth will grow as your knowledge of Scripture increases. You examine Scripture like the Bereans and have a Christian world view.

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (1 John 4:5-6)

You learn not to question God’s judgments because you know he is unfailing in his faithfulness. You flourish under his authority and orderliness. You won’t wonder if a sinful lifestyle would be better. You know God. You meet him in his Word daily.

The spiritual wisdom that comes from the Word will open your eyes and ears to see, hear and perceive life from God’s perspective. The Word of God is the

standard that distinguishes truth from lies. In conversations, the Spirit will give you compassionate insights to hurting hearts and spiritual needs of others.

*I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.*

*¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path. (Psalm 119:104-105)*

*Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me. (Psalm 119:133)*

*Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies. (Psalm 119:98)*

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.*

*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7)*

*For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. (Proverbs 2:10)*

Observe [God's decrees and laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? (Deuteronomy 4:6-7)

The Word equips you with wisdom the world cannot even comprehend. The guidance it gives will seem foolish to the world. But it will draw you into a deep relationship with Christ where nothing else matters. Only Christ. One thing. The way, the truth and the life of Christ.

Respect the Teachings of Law and Gospel

Another essential truth as you study and teach Scripture is understanding the difference between law and gospel. Theologians and scholars recognize the continual struggle to make the best applications of law and gospel but for the purpose of this training, law and gospel will be briefly defined and explained.



Defining and Recognizing Law and Gospel

Law—all the commands which tell people what God wants them to do and not to do. When Scripture tells you what God demands or how you should live, that is a message of the law.

Gospel—the good news that God in love sent Jesus to take away the sins of all people. When Scripture tells you what God gives and how he blesses you, that is a message of the gospel because those things come to you through Christ.

The specific message commonly referred to as “the gospel” is the truth that Jesus lived and died to pay for the sins of everyone.

Though the topic of law and gospel can be deeply theological and complex, it is also practical and important for those who teach the Word. When discussing God’s Word you need to understand whether a person needs correction from the law or comfort from the gospel. Luther summarized the quandary with his instruction to “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.”

If someone is comfortable with sin and thinks they are living well enough, they need to hear God’s demand of perfect holiness proclaimed in the law.

If someone is burdened and struggling with guilt over sin they need the reassurance of full and free forgiveness in Christ.

But it isn’t always that easy.

It is very hard to understand when and how to share the law with someone. You will be challenged to put this into practice when you teach. It is your love for others, not frustration, that fuels and compels you to talk to someone about sin.

The gospel can become muddied with discussions that emphasize feelings or emotions, godly living or human thinking. The proclamation of the gospel is the truth that Christ has completed the work of salvation. Learn to speak it clearly.

When you aren’t sure what to say, talk about the sacrificial love of Christ and his completed work of salvation. If you can only say one thing, let it be the gospel.

Thoughts to help you apply law and gospel:

1. Love is telling people what they need to hear not what they want to hear.

2. The law pricks hearts with questions about guilt, failure, worth, purpose and identity. It exposes the problem of sin.
3. The gospel is God's answer—it announces his work of salvation completed by Christ. But you can't have the answer without the question.

It is hard to understand that sharing the law is loving. People search for love and imagine it will always make them feel good. They are deluded into believing that love is whatever they want to hear instead of the truth of God. But our hearts ache with emptiness and guilt gnaws at our conscience. Love asks, "What is the truth?" Love isn't afraid to say what God says about sin and guilt—that is the law.

The law is important because you need to realize you cannot measure up and you will never meet God's demands because he requires perfection. It is not love to tell people it is okay to continue in sin that will end in damnation.

Tell people it doesn't have to be this way. We all have stuff in our lives that is messed up. Listen to the rescue plan from God. We can't walk in denial. You wouldn't let an alcoholic continue on the path of alcoholism—you want to help! You don't want people to continue in sin. You want them to understand the consequences of the sin.

It might be easiest to first point them to how their sin impacts their relationships with others—but ultimately they need to see that sin separates them from God.

This is all about love. Love means you're committed to people even if they never get it. It wounds your soul to think that people you are in a relationship with will not be in heaven. But you don't have to preach to them or at them every week—just let God work through the relationship. Encourage them in the relationship, be patient, keep working with them—don't feel the relationship has to be centered in addressing sin. It is a process.

God comes and changes the plot. He rewrites the story—and that is the gospel. The gospel is God's redeeming love story.



Law and Gospel by C.F.W. Walther

When you're ready to start delving into the deep stuff, you can learn much from a compilation of C.F.W. Walther's evening lectures entitled, "Law and Gospel." Written to guide pastors in applying law and gospel to their preaching, this rich resource will bless you with great insights and keen applications.



Other Ways the Words “Law” and “Gospel” are Used

There are other ways that “law” and “gospel” are used in Scripture. The context of the passage helps you understand how the word is being used.

“**Law**” sometimes refers to all of God’s Word.

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. (Psalm 119:97)

“**Law**” sometimes refers specifically to the Ten Commandments. It may also refer to all the demands of God.

Through the law we become conscious of our sin. (Romans 3:20)

“**Law**” might refer to the first five books of the Old Testament (also called the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. (Nehemiah 8:1)

“**Gospel(s)**” may also refer to one or all four books of the New Testament written to record the life of Christ (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

As your faith and love for the Scriptures grow, you will soon have a compelling desire to share the Word of God with others. As you begin to look for those opportunities, questions of self-doubt will attack. You? Do you know enough? Do you have enough wisdom? Are you sure?

That is why you are in this training.

Equip Women to Teach the Word sets you firmly on the foundation of Christ and silences your doubts with the truth of Scripture. It shows you how God’s Word prepares you for a lifetime of faithfully sharing Scripture.



Activity: Hear God's Redemptive Love Story

It's your turn to Hear God's Redemptive Love Story.

Step One: Explain the truths and beauty of the phrase, "God is found at the cross."

Step Two: Think about the forest and the pine needles. Talk about the passage below correctly in the context of Scripture (like you would explain how the needle fits in the forest). Then talk about someone who sees the needle but doesn't know about the forest. What might they not understand?

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
(Romans 8:1)*

Step Three: When someone expresses their intention to sin because they know they will be forgiven, what messages of law and gospel should you share?

GROW IN THE WORD

Introduction

You have the privilege of learning God's Word.

The most important reason you study God's Word is to be strengthened in your faith. It is the powerful and effective Word of God. As you seek quiet time with the Lord, devotion books can be a wonderful blessing and serve an important purpose. However, as one who teaches the Word, it is essential that you study your Bible.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Romans 10:17)

The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. (John 6:63)

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17)

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread. (Job 23:12)

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (Colossians 3:16)

If you aren't familiar with the Bible it will be difficult to teach Scripture correctly or explain God's Word. Even more, if you hope to pour out living water to others your own well needs to be full.

Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:14)

God fills your well of living water through the Word and sacraments (we will talk about the sacraments later in this lesson).

Neither can you teach others unless you are instructed in the Word. God has given you a pastor to guide you in learning Scripture. Consider attending your pastor's Bible Information Class to review the key teachings of Scripture. Ask him when you have questions about Scripture.

Have an intentional plan to read the whole Bible.



Possible Bible Reading Plans

Read your Bible cover to cover.

Work through the Gospels and Psalms, then study Old Testament history. Finish the rest of the New Testament and the rest of the Old Testament.

The EHV Digital Study Bible has a reading plan on the home page.

A "One Year Bible" provides readings for each day of the year that enable you to work through the entire Bible in one year.

These tools do not replace personal Bible study, but they may help you stay connected to God's Word on a daily basis:

<https://whataboutjesus.com/begin-read-bible/>

<https://forwardinchrist.net/bible-readings-2021/>

"YouVersion" and Bible Gateway are popular apps that send daily Bible passages and readings.

Set your Bible somewhere that will help you remember to read it. Keep your study materials nearby. If you can't find time to read every day, don't be overwhelmed or discouraged. Just try to read it the next day.

Very simply, you can ask four questions as you read:

1. What is God telling me here?
2. What does this lead me to confess?
3. How can I apply what I've learned?
4. What does this lead me to pray about?

Study Your Bible With Solid Resources

A strong devotional life is marked by regular time spent studying Scripture. If you are unable to spend time studying God's Word, at least find a section of Scripture to read (and memorize if you are able) and reflect on it throughout the day.



What is a Strong Devotional Life?

A strong devotional life means studying your Bible regularly.

This lesson encourages you to spend time reading God's Word as a part of your daily life. But this training also wants to help you understand the rich blessings, wisdom, and spiritual insights you gain by studying Scripture. Memorize passages to plant his Word in your heart.

A strong devotional life will stir you to receive the Lord's Supper regularly. You will treasure the opportunity to receive the sacrament where God will strengthen your faith.

Reflecting on your baptism daily is a wonderful reminder of the grace you have been given and the new life you have in Christ.

You will learn about the advantages of a study Bible very soon, but even without a study Bible there is much you can learn. It may seem intimidating, but the only thing you need to remember is—do it.

Here are more tips on how to study your Bible.

1. Open with prayer.
2. Read a section of Scripture and reflect on what is happening and being said.
3. Ask the question: what is God telling me?

4. Are there notes at the bottom of the page? (Remember they are not inspired).
5. Understand the context.
6. Look up the cross references in your Bible.
7. Look at a map. (Commonly found in the back).
8. Use a reliable commentary to help you understand what you read.
9. What do you know about the people? Are they important? Learn about them.
10. How would you respond if you were there and how can you apply this to your life?
11. Take notes—especially “a-ha” moments.
12. As you read Scripture make a list of what you might want to pray about.

13. Write down any questions for your pastor.

14. Memorize Scripture.

15. Who else needs to hear this?

A personal study Bible is essential as you grow in the Word—it is a worthy investment. The price range for study Bibles varies considerably but inexpensive options are available at places like Amazon, used bookstores, etc. Your pastor may also have recommendations or ideas to help you find a Bible.



Selecting a Personal Study Bible

A good study Bible will reap invaluable blessings. Consider either:

1. [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (ESV translation). There are several ESV study Bibles—be sure you look for the “Lutheran Study Bible” published by Concordia Publishing House.
2. The Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) digital study Bible is available at <http://wartburgproject.org/digital-ehv-study-bible>. (see the appendix for more information about this study Bible). Printed copies will soon be available.
3. The [Concordia Self-Study Bible](#) is no longer being printed but if you have it or can find a used copy, it is an excellent resource.

Here is a sample of a study Bible. This is the digital EHV study Bible—the pages are presented side by side on your screen (used with permission):

EHV Study Bible

EHV < Acts > < 17 > < Reference or Search > Today

In Athens

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was very distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he led a discussion in the synagogue with the Jews and those who feared God, as well as with those who happened to be in the marketplace every day.

¹⁸Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers^e also debated with him. Some said, "What is this seed picker^h trying to say?" Others said, "He seems to be someone who is proclaiming foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹They took him and brought him to the council of the Areopagus,ⁱ saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are talking about? ²⁰You seem to be bringing in some ideas that are strange to our ears, so we want to know what these things mean." ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there enjoyed doing nothing more than telling or listening to something new.)^j

²²Then Paul stood up in front of the council of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious^k in every way. ²³For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar on which had been inscribed, 'To an unknown god.' Now what you worship as unknown-this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made with hands.^l ²⁵Neither is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all people life and breath and everything they have. ²⁶From one man,^m he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live. ²⁷He did this so they would seek Godⁿ and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.^o ²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being.^p As some of your own poets have said, 'Indeed, we are also his offspring.'^q

Size -1 Resources

¹17:19 A large gathering of Athenian men such as this was customary almost daily because of their love of discussing matters of every kind (verse 21). It is uncertain whether this remained an informal discussion, or whether it became a more formal meeting of the council that bordered on an investigation.

^j17:21 Though the glorious days of the Athenian Empire were 400 years in the past, Athens was still something of a cultural center.

^k17:22 Paul chooses his words very carefully. The Greek word for *very religious* does not imply that the Athenians have a correct understanding of how to find God, but it commends them for the fact that they have an interest in spiritual things and are searching.

The Areopagus was a body that was commissioned by Athenian law to look into religious affairs. So it makes sense that Paul appears before them.

Their meeting place overlooked the Forum of Athens. (*Areopagus* means *Ares* or *Mars Hill*).

Forum of Athens viewed from the Areopagus



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A study Bible contains additional notes, maps and explanations about the text (often found at the bottom of the page). Many Bibles have introductory pages for each book of the Bible to help you learn about the context and background. It will identify the author, setting, purpose and outline of the book. This basic information helps you understand God's Word more thoroughly.



Terms Used in Study Bibles

A **reference** refers to the book, chapter, and verse where a passage is found (e.g., Genesis 1:1). Abbreviations for the books are commonly used.

A **cross-reference** will direct you to other passages that contain a similar message or key word. It also might point you to the original statement or actual event recorded in a different book of the Bible.

A **concordance** will list all the verses that include a particular word, for example, “weary.” Remember that words may be unique to a translation so if another translation says “tired” it will not appear. Google can help with that too—just follow the link to the Scripture reference!

A **Bible dictionary** can explain words that are unfamiliar to you.

A **chart of weights and measures** will give you the current equivalent for things like a “*drachma*” (which is money), an “*ephah*” (which is a measure of weight), or a “*cubit*” (which is a measure of length).

Maps are important as they give you an image to help you grasp the geography, terrains, or journeys recorded in Scripture. It might help you understand how long or difficult a journey would be.

A **harmony of the Gospels** will put all the events of the Gospels in chronological order. It is often helpful to know when an event happened.

These are just a few key tools common to many study Bibles. Learn to use your study Bible to unlock all the rich treasures!

You may also find it helpful to use a free online Bible study tool like biblegateway.com where you can read passages in many different translations. BibleHub.com will also show you all the passages that include a particular word. The commentaries on these sites are not always doctrinally correct and may include false teachings. Reading with discernment is important but these tools may help you find words or passages as you study.

Commentaries also help as they explain or analyze individual books of the Bible, chapter by chapter or verse by verse. They give you additional background and historical insights to enrich your understanding of the Word. They may also comment on specific words and their meanings from the original language.

There are many excellent books and commentaries to enrich your personal learning but it is important to read reliable commentaries. Commentaries are not inspired or without error—they will reflect the theological background or perspective of the author. Talk to your pastor about which commentaries or books would be best to read, he will likely have some good suggestions.

Consider building your own personal library of solid reference materials for your personal study. See the appendix for a list of resources to deepen your personal Bible study.

The most noteworthy commentary is the [People's Bible](#) series published by Northwestern Publishing House. Since you can purchase individual volumes corresponding to books of the Bible, it is very cost-efficient. The content, maps, outlines, and commentary are exceptional. Many church libraries have a set of People's Bibles.



Start a Personal Library With These Solid Resources

In addition to a personal study Bible, become familiar with these resources and consider adding them to your personal library.

[People's Bibles](#): commentary series that includes every book in Scripture (sample in the appendix).

[People's Bible Teachings](#): topical studies (sample in the appendix).

[Bible History Commentary](#) by Franzmann (three volumes):

Old Testament

New Testament 1 (covers Jesus' life through Gethsemane)

New Testament 2 (covers Jesus' arrest through Paul in Rome)

Kretzmann (a free online commentary: <http://kretzmannproject.org>).

The Holy Spirit will continue to increase your understanding of Scripture as you read your Bible, see the big picture, and study Scripture.

Learning the context of Scripture will be another important step in deepening your knowledge of the Word. Context is critical in understanding God's message correctly.

Context refers to the situation, historical setting, or placement of the text. When you read a passage or section of Scripture, look through the chapter to see what else is happening in those verses of Scripture. Check your study Bible or resources to learn the context. Who wrote the text? When, why, and to whom? What were the circumstances when it was written? Is there a reason the text appears in a particular place? What happens in the verses just before the text—or after it?



An Example of Context

You are likely familiar with God's command in Romans 13:1-5 about obeying government (when it doesn't conflict with God's Word).

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

If these words help you grasp God's supreme authority and his command to respect and obey the established government, you are right and have understood the message correctly.

But if you dig a little to understand the context, you will find that Paul writes these words when the Roman Emperor Nero was killing Christians.

That historical information does not change the meaning of the text, but it certainly sheds a new light on Paul's words.

This is a very simple example of context.

All this learning can be guided and supplemented by your pastor who studied for eight years to prepare for ministry. He has studied Biblical history, the original languages of Scripture, doctrine, preaching, teaching, and much, much more. Learn from his insights and talk to him about your thoughts and questions—he wants you to grow in faith and knowledge of the Word. He shares your love for Christ and his Word.

Gain Insights from the Old and New Testament

As you study your Bible be sure to also read the Old Testament and become familiar with its history. The rich, ancient and historical accounts have been preserved for your benefit—and the Old Testament offers wonderful insights about God and his people.

Most importantly you should study the Old Testament because:

1. Scripture is where you meet God and learn about him. The Old Testament gives magnificent glimpses of God's love, power and justice. You see him blessing, interacting and caring for his people. He reveals his thoughts, plans, and holiness with words of beauty and dignity.
2. The Old Testament is a historical record of God's saving work. It is the story of God's redeeming love told over and over again in the lives of different people for thousands of years. Each account in Scripture gives another vivid and living picture of God as he loves and helps his people.
3. You learn about God's many prophecies and promises that serve his holy purpose. You will see God never fails. Every prophecy and promise is filled according to his divine will. History unfolds with the affirmation that God is undeterred and unwavering in his plan to save humanity.
4. The Old Testament gives powerful evidence of God's patient love and forgiveness as humanity turns away from God in the Garden, at the Tower of Babel, before the Flood and throughout the lives of the patriarchs. You will not yet see the beautiful, fulfilled marriage of God to his people but you will see that God doesn't give up—his commitment is eternal.
5. Jesus quoted and treasured the Old Testament—the Jewish scrolls were his Bible. He read and referred to them often.
6. The New Testament church is filled with references and reverence for the Old Testament.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Now these things happened to [the Israelites] as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the [Old and New Testament] Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)



Categories of Old Testament Books

The Old Testament books are categorized into three groups:

- **Historical** books (about Israel's history)
- **Poetical** books (songs and wisdom literature)
- **Prophetical** books (God's messages spoken through prophets)

If the Old Testament is unfamiliar to you, it might help to start with a Bible history book that includes the most notable stories. Learn about the patriarchs (the word means "chief, or father of a family") and study Israel's Old Testament kings. Become familiar with biblical patriarchs such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and King David. Know the basic timeline of Israel's history.

"Israel" is the name of the land where God's Old Testament people lived. It is also the name God gave to his people (they were called the Israelites). You can read about Jacob, the first person God named "Israel" in Genesis 32:28 and 35:10.

Recognize the significance of Israel's history—it will deeply enrich your understanding of the New Testament—especially the gospel.



500 Year Blocks

As you are first learning Bible history, it might help you to remember these approximate dates:

- **2000 BC** – Abraham
- **1500 BC** – Moses
- **1000 BC** – King David
- **500 BC** – begins the period between the Old Testament and New Testament.

You will find an excellent timeline (and other helpful information) at understandchristianity.com on the [timelines tab](#).

Continue to read and study all the books of the Old Testament until most of the people and events are clear. As you come to know the people of the Old Testament better, you will find companions who have walked and stumbled through the journey of faith. Learn their lessons as you learn to love God.

You will see yourself in the Old Testament believers—and perhaps you will understand someone else better. Marvel at how God uses ordinary people to accomplish his holy will—and then underline the many places he forgives them when they are utter failures. Thank God he does not leave us in our sin.

It will also be a blessing to understand Old Testament worship, laws and covenants. It is especially important to grasp the Old Testament sacrifices which foreshadowed the payment of Christ's blood to atone for the sins of the world.



Important Definitions:

Atone—to make a payment to remove the guilt of sin so that God will no longer be angry.

Atonement—a payment offered to remove the guilt of sin so that God and sinful humans are reconciled. It may help you to remember “at-one-ment” because Jesus broke the barrier of sin and brought us peace with God.

Vicarious Atonement—the sacrifice of Jesus in our place, accepted by the Father as payment for our sins. (Vicarious means acting or done for another).

There were many ceremonies and sacrifices commanded by God to show his people that sin could only be paid for by a blood sacrifice.

Learn about the Old Testament temple to strengthen your understanding of New Testament passages which refer to God's temple. More than imagery or a concept, the New Testament repeatedly confirms that you are God's temple. The more you know about God's design and purpose for the temple—the better you will understand how you are now the temple of Christ.



Understand Old Testament Worship, Laws and God's Covenants

Learn about Old Testament worship and the sacrifices required as God's people were reminded that a blood payment was needed for sin. It foreshadows Christ's payment for sin.

Learn about the laws established in the Old Testament and understand the purpose of God's laws. There were civil, moral and ceremonial laws.

God's covenants in the Old Testament are especially important. A covenant is a solemn agreement, especially one in which God promises to bless and save. There are several significant covenants in the Old Testament that should be familiar to you.

The New Testament also brings incredible truths that point us to treasure our salvation in Christ and guide us to respond with lives of thanksgiving.

Gospels—the life of Christ is recorded in four Gospels (the word “gospel” means “good news”).

- The Gospel of Matthew is written by the apostle Matthew, a converted tax collector. Knowing he would have a Jewish audience, Matthew frequently refers to Jesus as the “Christ” or “Messiah” who was promised by God in the Old Testament.
- The Gospel of Mark is written by the evangelist also known as John Mark. This gospel shows Jesus as the Almighty Son of God in a fast paced account that would have appealed to the Romans (who despised the Jews). Mark’s gospel is closely associated with Peter’s memoirs of Christ.
- The Gospel of Luke is written by Luke, a physician and a traveling companion of the apostle Paul. Luke’s writing is filled with compassion and includes thoughtful details of many accounts with women.
- The Gospel of John is written by the apostle John, who often refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” It is the last gospel that was written and supplements much of what is not recorded in the other three gospels.

New Testament History—the book of Acts, also written by Luke, records the history, struggles, and growth of the New Testament church. It includes the three missionary journeys of Paul.

Epistles—the remaining books are epistles (the word “epistle” means “letter”). There are thirteen letters written by Paul, sometimes called the “Pauline Epistles.” Paul’s letters to Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Philemon are called the “Prison Letters” because they were written during Paul’s captivity in Rome. Paul’s “Pastoral Letters” include his letters written with pastoral advice (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).

Along with the remaining epistles of the New Testament, these letters (including Revelation) were distributed and read throughout the New Testament church and have been preserved by God as Holy Scripture.

Develop a Lifelong Pattern of Spiritual Growth

This journey of learning Scripture will last a lifetime and never cease to bring you closer to God. Your thoughts and actions—even the desires of your heart will be renewed to reflect the image of God.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

With an ongoing commitment to regularly study Scripture, Paul's words from Hebrews 5:12-14 couldn't be more relevant.

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.



What is "solid food?"

You aren't the first person to long for solid food with no idea of what it is.

- Solid food: God strengthens your faith through Scripture.
- Solid food: Cherish the sacraments.
- Solid food: Actively learn from your pastor.
- Solid food: Learn Scripture with other believers.
- Solid food: Pursue the insights of reputable resources.
- Solid food: Work through Scripture's teachings presented in the Catechism, creeds, and confessions.

Another blessing in the journey of spiritual growth is your relationship with your pastor. Purposefully invest yourself in this loving, shepherd-sheep relationship to gain spiritual wisdom and learn more about Scripture. You will be richly blessed as you treasure and appreciate your pastor's ministry and service. Pray for him as he bears the spiritual responsibility for your congregation.

You will find a variety of opportunities for Bible study through your church. These studies will be a wonderful place for you to learn from your pastor and receive training for your Christian service. God will continue to answer your prayers for spiritual growth as your faith is nurtured in Bible study.

As you learn alongside other believers, you will hear new and different insights, applications, and things to pray about. Discuss Scripture with your brothers and sisters in Christ—it will reveal perspectives and observations you may have never seen. God has put us together to learn from one another. We grow as one body and yet continually marvel at the unique insights and experiences that each person contributes for the benefit of others.

Delight in the relationships that grow at Bible study. Take time to listen to others and find personal connections to create friendships. Appreciate the ministry partnerships that are forged as you learn Scripture together. Recognize the importance of building those bonds especially within the church—this is your family in Christ.

Finally, your attendance at Bible study also sets a good example for others and gives them confidence that you are growing in your faith. It is helpful for them to see that believers continually learn more about Scripture. It is good to let others see how you value your pastor's teaching and show him respect.

Be an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)



Activity: Grow in the Word

It's your turn to Grow in the Word

Step One: Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15 and Psalm 34. How are they connected?

Step Two: How does this comment below from the EHV Study Bible help you understand more about the verses from 1 Samuel 21 and Psalm 34?

The circumstances that occasioned the writing of this psalm are described in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. In a moment of weakness of faith, David lost his confidence in the LORD's protection against Saul and fled to Israel's enemies, the Philistines. He sought refuge with Achish, king of the Philistine city of Gath. In this heading, Achish is called Abimelek, which seems to be a title of the Philistine kings. When David realized that he had foolishly put himself in danger by going to the Philistines for help, he faked insanity to escape from them. Through this experience David learned the truth of this psalm: "Blessed is the man who takes refuge in the LORD," not in his own schemes. Psalm 56 is from the same period of David's life and should be read with this psalm.

Step Three: When does your church offer Bible studies and which one(s) are best for you to attend?

EMBRACE THE BLESSINGS OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

This final section about the blessings of the church shows you God’s ongoing plan to hold and strengthen you. God connects you to all believers, which Scripture calls “the body of Christ” or “the kingdom of God.”

First, remember that God made you part of his kingdom. Scripture says you are “*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*” (1 Peter 2:9). As you learn more about God’s kingdom, you will delight in the beauty and magnitude of this holy nation.



The Kingdom of God or “Invisible Church”

The **kingdom of God** or “**invisible church**” includes all people everywhere who believe in Jesus as their Savior. They cannot be identified with absolute certainty because only God can see faith in the heart.

We start here because of the great privilege it is to be chosen as God’s holy people. Scripture repeatedly refers to this invisible church as a bride—and Christ is the Bridegroom (Isaiah 54:5, 62:5, John 3:29, Ephesians 5:33, Revelation 21:2,9). As a result, the church is referred to with feminine pronouns such as “she” or “her.” God places high honor on the church as she proclaims Christ and administers the sacraments.

You as an individual are also the bride of Christ, chosen by God with promises of grace, commitment, and holy love. It is a personal relationship in which God has sacrificed his own Son to make you his bride. He is delighted when you show his love to others—he is glorified (given attention and honor) when you share his Word of truth.

As you grow in your understanding of God’s saving work and intentional plan for his bride the church—and his plan for you—it will actually highlight the beauty, holiness, and importance of your own congregation.

“My little church on Hickory Street?”

Yes! Your congregation serves as a powerful blessing—it is the most intimate place where you are connected with your Savior through Word and sacrament. Your faith grows, and you are continually equipped to be involved in service and ministry—humbly reflecting God’s redemptive love for sinners.

Engage in Worship and the Means of Grace

You will receive great blessings through worship as you celebrate the presence of Christ. The Old and New Testament are filled with examples that emphasize the importance of worship in the lives of believers. Jesus said, *"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'"* (Luke 4:8).

The words of Paul resonate with our joyful call to worship, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God"* (Colossians 3:16).



What Are the Means of Grace and What Is Worship?

The **"means of grace"** refers to the gospel in Word and sacraments, by which God offers and gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

"Worship" includes any thoughts, words, or actions which we direct toward God as a way of praising him. For the purpose of this lesson, we will refer specifically to the worship services at your local congregation.

In worship you will hear the message of the law, where God condemns sin and reveals humanity's need for a Savior. You will also hear the gospel proclamation that Jesus has paid for your sins with his perfect life and innocent death. The messages of both law and gospel are essential elements of faithful Christian worship. They are distinctly different as one proclaims what God demands and the other announces what God has given.



Why Worship? Because God Invites and Commands You To Attend

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. (Psalm 22:22) This passage is also quoted in Hebrews 2:12.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (Exodus 20:8)

To encourage believers in the high value of worship, your church has developed many resources such as the hymnal "Christian Worship." The truth and beauty captured in the texts of Lutheran hymnody are rich, but you will also find prayers, psalms, and Scripture readings commonly used in worship. Look through the front section of your hymnal where you will find rich resources to guide your worship and express your faith.

Engage more deeply in your congregation's worship services as you discover what happens in worship and why it is important. As you know more about the purposeful, ordered parts of worship, you will have a greater appreciation for Lutheran worship. Grasp the beautiful and intentional parts of worship—your faith will be enriched with understanding and insights.



What Is Liturgy?

Many Lutheran churches use a liturgy in their worship services. The word liturgy comes from two Greek words meaning “people” and “work.” This style of worship, known as liturgical worship, is built on the historic Christian order of worship. “For as long as believers have gathered together, they have naturally included certain elements in their worship of God.”³

Despite being centuries removed from the early Christian Church, the basic form and primary focus of worship—that is, the liturgical style—has remained constant. God grants his people freedom in worshipping him, and therefore not all Lutheran churches elect to use a liturgy. Liturgical worship allows for great variety within a set pattern. It is not tied to a specific musical style, nor does it prefer one musical instrument over another. However, the liturgy used in the majority of Lutheran churches generally follows an orderly progression of thought focusing the worshiper on the means of grace.

The Lutheran liturgy contains a set pattern of basic elements such as canticles, Scripture readings, prayers, and hymns. Liturgy can also refer to different orders of worship. Common examples are Matins (Morning Praise), Divine Service (Common Service, Service of Word and Sacrament, Service of the Word), Vespers (Evening Prayer), Compline (Prayer at the Close of Day) and others. It does not always contain the same liturgical elements.

Ultimately, the liturgy serves as a cradle for the means of grace. Through the liturgy, the gospel is proclaimed, sins are forgiven, and the Sacraments are distributed. Through the liturgy, Jesus Christ is worshiped and proclaimed.

Dr. Kristi Meyer, [Understanding Lutheran Worship](#)

³ Baumler, Gary, and Kermit Moldenhauer, editors. Christian Worship: Manual. Northwestern Publishing House, 2002.

Esteemed in the liturgy, we pay special attention to the honor given to the Lord’s Supper which God has entrusted to the church. This is called a “mark” of the church because love and respect for the sacraments will identify a church who worships according to God’s commands. You belong to a “sacramental” church, which means that your church honors what the Bible teaches about the sacraments. God’s two holy sacraments are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

There are many important reasons to stay actively engaged in congregational worship and the sacraments.

1. Stay connected to the Word and grow in your understanding.
2. Remain humble and dependent on Christ.
3. Receive God's strength in the Sacrament.
4. Stay connected to the pastor, leaders, and family of Christ.
5. Be a godly example of a believer who loves God's Word, his bride, and fellow believers.
6. Establishing confidence in others that you are being taught the truth.



What is a Sacrament?

A **sacrament** is a sacred act that Christ established for his church, in which an earthly element is used together with God's Word, as a means of offering, giving, and sealing to us the forgiveness of sins and thus also life and salvation.

Baptism is the sacrament in which water is used in the name of the Triune God to bring people into the family of God.

The Lord's Supper, also called **Holy Communion**, is the sacrament in which the body and blood of Jesus are given together with bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.



Important Resources to Deepen Your Understanding

Luther's Catechism includes an in-depth study of the sacraments with Scripture references so you can see what the Bible teaches.

The People's Bible Teaching Series includes topics central to Christianity and explains what Scripture teaches about Angels, Baptism, Christ, Creation, the Holy Spirit, Trinity, Sanctification, and more. See the appendix for a sample of this resource.

The means of grace is the gospel in Word and sacraments. The Word and sacraments are God's gifts to create and strengthen faith. The sacraments are not spiritual rites you follow to obey God, the sacraments are given for you to receive his blessings. God comes in the sacraments to give souls his grace and forgiveness. We are intimately connected to him through baptism and the Lord's Supper. The sacraments are holy, sacred, priceless treasures to the church.

There are several important truths you should remember about the means of grace:

1. God comes to us in baptism and the Lord's Supper to create and strengthen faith.
2. We receive spiritual strength—this is not our act of obedience.
3. He reminds us of his love and forgiveness with tangible elements that we can touch.
4. The sacraments have been entrusted to the church. She administers the sacraments.

Listen Attentively to the Sermon

Many believers struggle with the temptation to show up for church on Sunday, mindlessly respond in liturgy, and return home with no further thought about the message of God's Word. In fighting this temptation, it will be helpful to prepare for worship in various ways.

Ask your pastor about the readings for worship so you can reflect on those Scripture verses prior to worship. Take time to read the Scripture passages and talk about them with your family. Build anticipation for what will be read, then listen for particular topics or words. If the theme of the service has been shared earlier in an e-mail or newsletter, make a note to meditate on it throughout the week.



The Scripture Readings for Worship

The “**lectionary**” is an historical set of Scripture readings. Reviewing the readings in advance will help you know what to expect in worship. It will give you time to reflect on the Scripture passages that will be read or taught. For centuries, the church has utilized an annual calendar called “the church year” (p. 157 in *Christian Worship 1993*), which establishes a plan for the festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, and worship for other Sundays. Each Sunday has an assigned reading and Psalm which you will find in the front of the hymnal printed as the “**Lectionary**” (p. 163 in *Christian Worship 1993*). You will find the commonly used readings and reflection questions at wels.net/worship-helps.

Other times, worship may center around a specific theme (like a series on the Apostles’ Creed) or the pastor may select the readings.

As you take in the sights and sounds of Lutheran worship, you will notice how everything points to Christ. Christ-centered worship means that every part of worship draws you to the gospel message. The readings, hymns, and sermon will all work together to proclaim God’s plan of salvation in Christ. Truths about Christ radiate from the Word and offer countless themes for worship.

Each Sunday, the law and gospel will be woven into the liturgy and hymns—it will be proclaimed from the pulpit by God’s called servant. The message will resonate as you follow along with the responsive parts of worship and readings for the day. You will be filled with the joy of our Savior as you participate in the music and prayers. You are invited to offer your praise and thanksgiving. You will taste it at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.



A Receptive Heart Will Help You Listen

There may be times you are tempted to gloss over Bible verses or teachings that are difficult. There may be a portion of Scripture that makes you uncomfortable. You might want to ignore those messages and give them little thought. But God calls you to resist that temptation. He calls you to set your mind on his truth.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2)

Open your ears, and hear the words of wise people, and set your mind on the knowledge I give you. (Proverbs 22:17)

To keep your ears open to the truth of God you must also respect your pastor, for he is the one giving you God's message. Eagerly listen for his words of truth—he has been appointed by God to preach the Word to you.

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. (Hebrews 13:17)

God knows people are tempted to hear only what they want to hear. He knows some people will not listen at all. Scripture warns you against the danger of having ears that are "itching" or unwilling to hear.

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Hear the seriousness of the law and recognize that you are a sinner. Listen with eager anticipation for the message of the gospel that brings forgiveness and hope. Meditate on the sermon's insights and examples. Think about how to apply what you've heard and remember it. Ask God to lead your thinking and show you his truth. In worship, God is welling up his Spirit within you.

You can also listen intentionally to share insights with others. Make notes or underline Scripture passages that might be an encouragement to someone you know. Consider how you might share thoughts from the sermon, prayers or hymns with others. It will be natural for you to share the thoughts, music, or passages that were especially meaningful to you.

Grow in Your Understanding of the Creeds and Confessions

Though there is much more to learn, we also give special attention to the confession of faith spoken in the words of a creed. This means your church is a "creedal" church—it confesses the teachings of several creeds.

A creed is a statement of what a person or group of people believes and teaches.



Did Jesus Think Creeds Were Important?

Jesus knew that some people would walk with him and others would turn away in unbelief. Jesus talked with his disciples about what they believed in Matthew 16:13-16. He asked, *"Who do people say the Son of Man is? But what about you? Who do you say I am?"*

Peter's answer, *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"* is a confession of faith. That is what believers do. Christians confess what they believe on the basis of what Jesus has taught them.

It is also clear from the text in Matthew that the answer separated the disciples from the crowd and Jewish leaders. It identified them as those who trusted Jesus and believed his Word.

The Apostles' Creed is commonly recited to profess the central truths of the Christian church. It reflects the teachings of Christ's first apostles. The Nicene Creed, a creed written in Nicaea, is also commonly spoken. The Athanasian Creed defends the Scriptural truths about the Triune God.



The Ecumenical Creeds

The ecumenical or universal creeds include the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. All three are accepted in mainstream Christian churches.

The word "ecumenical" means "relating to, or representing the whole of a body of churches." (Merriam-Webster)

Your church professes agreement with these Christian creeds as well as the teachings of Scripture explained by the Lutheran Church and written in the Lutheran Confessions.

The creeds and confessions clarify many of Scripture's important doctrines (or teachings) and refute false teachings that threaten the church. The creeds and confessions preserve, proclaim, and protect the unchanging truths of God's Word. They were written in response to false teaching and identify what believers confess according to the truths of Scripture.

In studying the creeds and confessions, it will be helpful to understand the problems of the time period and what prompted the writings. If you research the false doctrine being taught, you will understand why the specific creed or confession was written. This is a great discussion to have with your pastor!

Having a summary of these key teachings of Scripture serves you well in learning more about the teachings of the church. The creeds and confessions give you deep thoughts for meditation and clear words for expressing your Christian faith. You will find the creeds reliable and consistent with Scripture.

As you learn about the history and teachings in the creeds it will heighten your respect and appreciation for your church. Rather than confining us, these creeds and the Lutheran Confessions assure us that we are on God's path of truth, "*and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32). This is the truth for which Luther contended and by which he was able to stand.

Many of the church's early writers capture the truth of Scripture with fiery and contagious passion for the Word and sacraments. Their writings will fill you with humility, equip you with knowledge, and motivate you for service. The teaching of the Lutheran church and the confessions are important—and they never get old.



The Creeds and Confessions

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- The Athanasian Creed (emphasizes the Trinity)
- Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism
- The Augsburg Confession (presented at a church meeting in Augsburg, Germany) and its defense, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (an "apology" is a statement of defense—it defended the teaching).
- The Smalcald Articles
- Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
- Formula of Concord (a Lutheran Confession which includes these writings along with the Epitome and Solid Declaration).

You can read a brief description about these writings and learn more about the Lutheran Confessions at <https://whataboutjesus.com/what-are-the-lutheran-confessions/>.

The Book of Concord is a collection of these creeds and Lutheran confessions. You can download a free copy at <http://www.bookofconcord.org> to read and study.

Start by reading [Luther's Small Catechism](#) and [Luther's Large Catechism](#). They will be an excellent introduction to other confessional writings. Knowing you will face all kinds of false teachings and questions about what Scripture teaches, these writings will be an important part of being equipped as a teacher of the Word.

Northwestern Publishing House has released a [newer version of Luther's Small Catechism](#) which is available in several translations ([NIV](#), [ESV](#) and [EHV](#)).

Your Turn to Stand Secure in Grace and Truth

It's your turn to Stand Secure in Grace and Truth.

Review and Exercises

Review the following exercises from this lesson. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section.

Hear God's Redemptive Love Story

- Explain the truths and beauty of the phrase, "God is found at the cross."

Grow in the Word

- Read Acts 16:11-40 and Philippians 1:3-5. List one person or event that may have been mentioned in Paul's prayers of thankfulness.

Embrace the Blessings of the Church

- Identify two or three things that cause you distraction or frustration prior to worship. Always late? Can't find your son's shoes? Hungry? Create and implement solutions to those problems to minimize distractions and frustrations.

Lesson 2: Respond with Fruitful, Christian Living



Christ-Centered Lives of Thankfulness

Pray Continually

Hear God Speak About Your Holy Life

Learn About Spiritual Gifts

Introduction

Richly fed with the Word, motivated by the gospel, and empowered by the Spirit, you are renewed to live in a strong relationship with God, grow in faith, and serve him with your gifts. This is the work of God through the Word. God has uniquely designed you and continues to equip you to live for his glory.

You continue to learn about Christian living as you study God’s Word. You hear God’s invitation to pray continually, especially as you meditate on Scripture. The Spirit calls you to listen to God’s law and apply it with a yielded heart—heed his wisdom. As you grow in faith you will seek ways to respond in love and then find that God has equipped you with the spiritual gifts you need to serve.

PRAY CONTINUALLY

Christians regularly pray together in worship and frequently pray for others—we cherish the privilege of prayer. Scripture’s key teachings about prayer give both a foundation and freedom to the prayer life of Christians.

Prayer is an act of worship in which we speak to God from our hearts.

It is important for you to know that God only listens to the prayers of those who approach him through the merits of Christ. That is why prayers often end with the phrase, “in Jesus’ name.” Those words help believers remember why their prayers are heard. The actual words are not required, but faith in the work of Christ is essential. You can only approach the Lord in prayer because of Jesus.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. (1 Peter 3:12)

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

*The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles. (Psalm 34:17)*

And God wants you to pray.



God Invites and Commands You To Pray

We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. (Daniel 9:18)

May my prayer linger before you like incense, the lifting up of my hands like an evening offering. (Psalm 141:2)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

Pray continually. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Colossians 4:2)

Your prayers may bring a sense of comfort, peace, or contentment as you share your burdens or express your joy—you have spoken to the Almighty God! But visualize an upward arrow to understand what happens in prayer. You offer prayers to God from a heart of faith and they rise to heaven like incense. Your prayers are an upward arrow as you speak to God. But it is a one way arrow—nothing is coming down.

Now visualize a downward arrow and remember that your communication with God is most certainly a dialogue—God does speak to you! But Scripture teaches that God only speaks to you through the inspired (literally, “God-breathed”) words of Scripture. When he gives strength, hope, faith, and comfort, it will come to you through the Word. When you long for fellowship with Christ and the power of his voice, you will find him in Scripture where he comes to you. The downward arrow brings the fullness of God to you through Word and sacrament.

Lutherans summarize the truths of these two separate arrows by emphasizing that “prayer is not a means of grace.” Faith is not strengthened through the act of prayer, God strengthens his people through the means of grace.

Discover More About Prayer

Very simply, prayer is an act of worship in which we speak to God from our hearts. But what we say and how we say it will vary greatly.

Prayers may have a specific focus such as thanksgiving for a blessing, a specific request, or confession of sin. But most often, prayers include all these and more. It is not essential that every prayer includes each type of petition. Overall, you will see your prayers cover a broad spectrum of themes and topics, especially as they are shaped by Scripture. You will learn more about that soon.

Prayers also vary in style—you are familiar with many types of spoken prayers:

- Prayers spontaneously spoken from the heart
- Memorized prayers
- Written prayers that are read
- Scripture verses that are read as prayers

Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are also prayers.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (Colossians 3:16)

Sadly, there are also moments of silence when your heart and mind are drawn to God yet there are no words to express your thoughts. In times of silent weeping when you cannot find words to speak, God gives this assurance:

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

Prayers will also be offered in many settings. Christians pray alone, in small groups, or publicly in worship (this is sometimes called "corporate prayer"). Within these settings, some prayers will be more formal and others will be less formal. This does not impact the value or effectiveness of a prayer. All your prayers are heard by God because of Christ. Your prayers are effective because you have been given the righteousness of Christ—his righteousness makes your prayers powerful.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

You will also want to understand the words of Ephesians 6:18, "*Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*" As your prayer life develops, there may be times that you feel inadequate, clumsy, or awkward. With a desire to "*pray in the Spirit,*" you may be misled about what that term means.

To "*pray in the Spirit*" is not a reference to the flowery, lyrical nature of a prayer. Nor does it indicate an emotional experience or overwhelming sense of deep spirituality. The Holy Spirit dwells in you as a believer in Christ, and he gives you the desire and ability to pray. Because you are praying in faith, you are praying "*in the Spirit.*" Don't worry about stumbling over your words—your prayers are an act of faith blessed by the Spirit. God is listening to your heart of faith.

And the Lord knows your heart. He understands your thoughts, concerns, and questions. He sees your heart and all the emotions that either burden or bless you. You don't need to hide them—you won't tell him anything he doesn't already know. Speak freely with him like you would talk to a friend at the end of a day. It will become more natural as you continue to pray.

*Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.*

⁴*I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.*

⁵*I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you. (Psalm 63:3-5)*



Words Commonly Used in Discussions About Prayer

Address – The first words of the Lord’s Prayer, indicating to whom the prayer is spoken. Prayers can be addressed to the Lord using any of his names. Prayers can be addressed to any person of the Trinity.

Adoration or Praise – To speak joyfully and admirably about God’s goodness or gifts.

Amen – Spoken at the end of a prayer, it means “so be it.”

Confession of Sins – An admission of sin. Believers may confess specific sins they have committed and/or they may confess that they are by nature sinful. Believers may also confess their failure to do the good works God has commanded—these are sins of omission.

Ex corde (x-cord-ay) – To pray “from the heart” without a printed prayer.

Doxology – an expression of praise to God.

Imprecatory Prayers – A prayer to invoke God’s wrath and judgment on someone who has done evil. (Talk to your pastor if you have questions.)

Intercession – To intercede, to pray on behalf of someone else.

Petition – A request.

Supplication – To ask or beg for something earnestly.

Thanksgiving – To speak words of gratitude; to thank and acknowledge the one who gives blessings and gifts.



Learn More About Prayer

“[Prayer, An Audience With the King](#)” by Pastor Joel Petermann is an excellent resource to learn more about what Scripture teaches regarding prayer—it is part of the People’s Bible Teaching series. WELS Women’s Ministry has a coordinating Bible study written by Marilyn Miller that is available as a free download.

Let Scripture Shape Your Prayers

Think back to the imagery of the two separate but parallel arrows. You speak to God in prayer, and God speaks to you through the Word.

As your prayer life grows, Scripture will increasingly influence your prayers. You will certainly continue to pray about your thoughts, thankfulness, and concerns—but you will also begin to pray about God's thoughts. In a deepening pattern of spiritual life, your own thoughts, words, and desires will become more and more like God's thoughts, words, and desires. Your prayers "*in the Spirit*" will increasingly reflect the Holy Spirit who dwells within you.

The Spirit will urge you to pray for strong faith, godly wisdom, and opportunities to serve. You will find yourself praying for a generous and hospitable heart, an outpouring of spiritual gifts, and willingness to suffer for the gospel. You will pray for strength to love others unconditionally and courage to share the gospel with everyone. These are all prayers of the Spirit—they reflect God's Word and will.

Remember this is not about style or emotion—this is about learning how your prayer life grows in connection to God's Word.

The greatest place to receive guidance for prayer is in the Word—and the Lord's Prayer is the perfect place to start. Luther's writings on the Lord's Prayer are a magnificent guide as you learn to pray. Study and learn about each part (or petition) of the Lord's Prayer. Luther's beloved explanation of the address is a shining example of the rich treasures in the catechism:

Our Father in heaven.

What does this mean?

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.

The Lord's Prayer doesn't just teach you the words to use in prayer—it teaches you what to pray. Praise God, ask for strength, forgiveness, daily bread, and more. There are many ways to pray the Lord's Prayer. Follow the Savior's pattern.

- Recite the Lord's Prayer, honoring the holy words of Christ as he taught his disciples to pray.
- Study Luther's Catechism to understand the concepts that Jesus teaches you about prayer. Pray about what you have learned.
- Pray a single petition. There are seven petitions, so you could pray one petition each day of the week (e.g. pray the first petition "Hallowed be your name" every Sunday).



An Example of Praying a Single Petition: Hallowed be your name.

Great King and Lord of all, we praise you for the holiness of your name.

You are the great I AM—the holy one filled with compassion, grace, love, and faithfulness. Your name is who you are—and you have revealed yourself in Scripture with majesty, honor, and righteousness. The heavens declare your glory, and creation begs to speak your name.

In your great mercy, you have boldly written your name on our hearts. You have redeemed us with the blood of your Son and inscribed upon us the name above all names. The image of the Most Holy Lord is imprinted within us by the power of your Spirit.

With awe and humility we lift our voices to praise you and give you our deepest adoration. We pray that our lives are a continual testimony of your righteousness, everlasting love, and unfailing faithfulness. We eagerly look for the day you will return to gather us to your Holy City and dwell in your eternal presence. Amen, Lord God—let it be done.

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs that are expressive and beautiful prayers. A psalm is a sacred song—although the words can be sung or spoken. The psalms were originally used in worship, incorporated into daily living, and accompanied God's people on their religious journeys. Pray the psalms by singing or reading them aloud and memorizing verses to pray spontaneously:

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. (Ps. 103:1)



An Example of Praying a Psalm Verse: Psalm 103:1

I praise you, Lord! All my inmost being praises your holy name. Every part of my soul dances with joy at your greatness. I am in awe of your majesty—and the deepest treasure of my heart is your name. You are the Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the end of all that is and is to be.

I am humbled by the holiness of your name and lift my voice in praise of who you are. You are the Shepherd of my soul and the Lion of Judah—you are my God. One day, every knee will bow at the sound of your name to acknowledge that you are Lord. All glory and honor will be given to you and the heavens will delight in exalting your name.
Amen.

Read the book of Psalms repeatedly until you can easily find psalms that bring comfort, confess guilt, and offer words of praise and adoration to God. This will be helpful for you—and equip you to encourage others with God's Word.

You can learn about prayer and you can memorize prayers—but the best way to learn to pray is to pray.



Other Ways To Pray

A.C.T.S. or “*C.A.S.T. all your anxiety on him for he cares for you*”
(1 Peter 5:7): Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

- Adoration offers God praise for his majesty, power, mercy, and the countless ways he has revealed himself as a holy God.
- Confession includes your personal sins (confessed individually or collectively). It may include the sins of a group such as the nation or God’s people (this is called “corporate confession”).
- Thanksgiving is offered with gratitude for God’s many gifts.
- Supplications (or requests) are offered humbly but boldly—and according to God’s will.

Hymns are beautiful prayers with rich truths that can be sung or spoken:

- Hymns of Worship and Praise (e.g., All Praise to God Who Reigns Above, Let All Things Now Living).
- Hymns about Baptism are a wonderful way to recall your baptism and its rich blessings (e.g., Baptized into Your Name Most Holy, All Who Believe and Are Baptized).
- Hymns of Confession and Absolution (e.g., With Broken Heart and Contrite Sigh, Jesus Sinners Does Receive).
- Evening Hymns are especially calming (e.g., Abide With Me, Now Rest Beneath Night’s Shadow).

The Scriptures are also filled with believers who also teach us about prayer. Some of the great prayers of the Bible include:

- Daniel’s prayer of repentance (Daniel 9:4-19).
- Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10).
- Dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 6:14-42).
- Nehemiah’s prayer of repentance (Nehemiah 1:5-11).
- Mary’s prayer (Luke 1:46-55).
- Simeon’s prayer (Luke 2:29-32).
- Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:15-23).

Memorized prayers such as the common table prayers or Luther’s Morning and Evening prayers are also meaningful. You can add personal prayers at the end of those prayers. See the appendix for Luther’s prayers.

Pray At Bible Study

As you teach God's Word you will mentor others and lead by your example with many opportunities to teach and model prayer.

Pray with others often, especially at Bible study, to nurture a culture of prayer that is influenced by Scripture, compelled by love for one another, and confident in God's invitation.

The topic of Bible study, the Scripture verses read, and the discussions that follow are all things to pray about at the end of Bible study. Make notes during Bible study of things to pray about—or ask someone to write it down and remind you when it is time to pray. If you know someone who is comfortable leading others in prayer, you could say, "Mattie, would you mind praying about that at the end of Bible study?" This gives her some time to gather her thoughts and gives others a chance to lead in prayer.

There may be an especially painful or personal conversation that comes up in Bible study, and you should feel comfortable stopping at that moment to pray for the situation. Certainly this wouldn't happen often, but there are times when the compulsion to pray is overwhelming. Don't feel awkward about stopping to pray.

Encourage participants to pray for one another, then watch the Spirit move them to acts of love and kindness. Personal concerns and support for each other are often shared before Bible study, and women frequently assure one another of their continued prayer support. Indeed, believers are commanded to pray for others and remain steadfast in concern for them:

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (James 5:16)

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Colossians 4:2)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (Ephesians 6:18)

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. (Romans 15:30)

Your prayers as a Bible study leader do not need to be poetic and lovely. You need to pray as a daughter speaks to her dear father. It may help others to know what simple, heart-felt prayers sound like. There may not be many opportunities for women to hear the prayers of other women. Bible study provides a perfect place to allow others a glimpse of your personal prayer life.

Your example of confidence in God's listening ear and trust in his powerful arm will be a wonderful encouragement for women learning about the Father who desires their prayers. It is also helpful to remind believers that with God's invitation to pray, no concern is too small.

A community of women who study the Word and pray together is an exceptional blessing and powerful witness.



Activity: Pray Continually

It's your turn to Pray Continually

Step One: Write down the one requirement for prayer.

Step Two: Write a prayer based on an element of ACTS/CAST (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication) or a petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Step Three: List several benefits of spending time in prayer at the end of Bible study.

HEAR GOD SPEAK ABOUT YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

Introduction

You are likely excited to respond to God's grace with a life of humble thanksgiving. The apostle Paul pens the thought beautifully as he unveils the true motive for Christian living.

Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Paul's very first letter, written to the congregation in Galatia, joyfully teaches you about the Lord's work in believers as the Holy Spirit bears fruit in their lives.

What I am saying is this: Walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out what the sinful flesh desires. ¹⁷ For the sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another, so that you do not continue to do these things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the control of the law.

²² But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the spirit, let us also walk in step with it. (Galatians 5:16-18, 22-25 EHV)

Christian living flourishes under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, given to you through the Word and sacraments. Luther writes about the work of the Holy Spirit in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed. His words give us clear assurance and unquestionable evidence of the Spirit's work. Luther captures the activity, outcome, and faithfulness of God the Holy Spirit.

I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.

But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.

On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

The Word guides you to express your joy and gratitude with Christian living—this is called your life of sanctification. The word “sanctify” means to set apart or make holy. In the Old Testament, God’s temple was furnished with items that were set apart and used only for holy purposes (see 1 Kings 7). Bowls, pots, and utensils were designed, created, and set apart for use in the temple. These items were not used anywhere else. In the New Testament, God talks about his people the same way. You are designed, created, and made holy by faith—even your Christian living sets you apart. Sanctified living comes as a result of justification.



The difference between justification and sanctification

Though these words might initially sound like theological jargon, they are actually very important points you need to understand.

“**Justification**” refers to the saving work of Christ that paid for the sins of the world—it is a “not guilty” verdict. A memory peg might be, “It’s just-as-if-I’d never sinned.” When God looks at you, he doesn’t see your sin because your debt has been paid. You are justified—this is God’s declaration and verdict because of the work of Christ. This work is done.

“**Sanctification**” is completely different as it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit as you respond to the gospel. Motivated by grace, believers bear the fruit of love and good deeds. As you grow in your understanding of the Word, the Spirit gives you the desire, ability, and guidance to live according to God’s will. This holy living is called your life of sanctification, and it flows from the justification you received in Christ.

Dr. Lyle Lange makes several helpful, clarifying distinctions between justification and sanctification in his book, [People’s Bible Teaching: Sanctification](#).

1. Whereas justification involves a change in people’s status before God, Christians’ sanctified lives involve a change in their hearts and lives in relation to God and their neighbor (p. 31).
2. Whereas justification excludes all human works, sanctification of the Christian life consists in the good works God enables the Christian to do (p. 36).
3. Whereas justification is complete and perfect in Christ, the Christian’s sanctified life in this world remains imperfect and incomplete (p.37).
4. Whereas justification embraces all people, sanctification takes place only in believers (p. 39).
5. Whereas justification gives us complete certainty of salvation, the sanctified Christian life produces evidence of faith but can never give us complete certainty of salvation (p. 40).

Reflect God's Image

This training began with an emphasis of God's redemptive love proclaimed in Scripture. It took you back to the Garden where the Lord created humanity in his image. Now, his Spirit works in you to restore the image of God first given in the Garden and lost through sin.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds;²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:9-10)

Knowledge and insights about the image of your Creator will only come from God's Word. Watch him work to help and save his people—see how he does it with faithfulness, love and, mercy. Learn about God's unchanging thoughts, holy desires, and divine characteristics (these are often called his "attributes").

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Exodus 34:6-7)

Scripture points you to Jesus who is the fullness of God and the Word made flesh. God's holiness shines through the life of Jesus and as your faith matures, his image will continue to be restored in you. You grow to reflect Jesus more clearly.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. (Romans 8:29)

"Yes," you pray, "Let your image be seen in me! Help me live like Christ!"

God answers that prayer as he works in you through the Word and sacraments. The Word nurtures you. Your baptism continually reminds you of the grace freely given for you. The body and blood of Christ strengthen you. Spiritual growth is God's miracle in you.

*"Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
 or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers." (Psalm 1:1-3)*

Pray the words of the hymnist,

Almighty Father, bless the Word
Which through Your grace we now have heard.
Oh, may the precious seed take root,
Spring up, and bear abundant fruit!

God's Word strengthens faith and guides believers with power and wisdom for holy living. God tells you how to live for his glory with his blessings.

*Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.*

¹⁰⁶ *I have taken an oath and confirmed it,
that I will follow your righteous laws. (Psalm 119:105-106)*

Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.⁴⁰ Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time. (Deuteronomy 4:39-40)

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (John 14:21, 23)



Your Joyful Holy Living

Your life is a reflection of God's image—it will reflect his love and holiness. It is your joy to bear the name and image of the Lord who saves!

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

How can you learn more about what it means to bear God's image in the world?

The answer is to simply study Scripture and learn about God. Learn about who God is and what he did to save the world. Every word of Scripture fills you with understanding because the Word is the place where you meet God.

With humble awe you will also listen to his law with a renewed heart. First you will be reminded of God's command and your need for a Savior, then with a grateful heart, meditate on what God is telling you to do.

Here is an example of how to listen to Scripture with a willing heart and be guided into holy living. Meditate on the words of Deuteronomy 11:18-20.

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Trusting in the forgiveness of Christ, you hear this teaching of the law with a desire to examine your life and follow God's will.

- *Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds...*

God wants to bless you by saturating your soul with his Word and planting it deep in your heart. How can you eagerly follow this command and keep his Word near you? Meditate on the blessings God wants you to have by securing his Word in your heart and mind. Seek ways to set your life and faith on the foundation of the Word.

- *Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads...*

God encourages you to be surrounded and influenced by reminders of his love and truth. Keep his grace in sight at all times—remember God never loses sight of you. He engraved you on the palm of his hand before you were born. Let all your actions and thoughts be tied to his love. Bind his Word in your heart by memorizing Scripture.

- *Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up...*

Let God's grace spill from your heart with his words of truth. Share them with everyone around you! Bring Christ's love and grace into your conversations from morning until evening, sharing Scripture whenever you are able. Let him speak through you, wherever he has placed you.

- *Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

How can you be a witness and share God's truth in society? The world needs God's message of salvation and you are called to take his grace out into the world wherever you go. God wants to draw all people to himself and you point others to his grace in Christ. His name is written on your heart—let it also be proclaimed in your words and actions!

Study Scripture and be compelled to share Christ's love—it is indeed a joy and delight. Treasure those moments and appreciate the beauty of his perfect Word.

At other times you will be called upon to bear God's image in hardship.

You will have struggles as a sinner in a sinful world with sinful people—and it will result in hardship. Bitterness, pain, sickness, tragedy, and broken relationships are just a few things that disfigure our reflection of God's image. It is extremely difficult to bear up under hardship—it is even more difficult to bear God's image in hardship. Yet God promises he is faithful.

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. (Deuteronomy 7:9)

Scripture teaches you about the spiritual refinement that comes through trials. God has the power and ability to work all things for the good of those who love him. He assures you that you are still under his care even as you are being refined.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ¹ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

*I will refine them like silver
and test them like gold.
They will call on my name
and I will answer them;
I will say, 'They are my people,'
and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.' (Zechariah 13:9)*

God can use the hardships and suffering of this world for good—he encourages you to trust in him even when it hurts. Some of your growth will come in the midst of hardships as God shows you his power, the certainty of his Word and the tenderness of his compassionate love.

The Lord is your Good Shepherd who watches over you. He guides you into green pastures to stay safe, flourish and live in peace with him. This is the holy life you are called to—a life under the Lord's faithful care.

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
³ he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:1-3)*



Examples in Scripture

The lives of many people are recorded in Scripture to teach you about the blessing of godly living and the consequences of sin. Learn from those who have gone before you—watch the Lord keep his promises and protect his people.

Scripture will also show you the eroding work of the devil, the depths of depravity, the pain caused by sin, heartfelt confession, complete forgiveness, and the power of God through it all.

Resist Sin

It is often true that we need to say two things when talking about God's truth. First of all, it is a privilege for you to reflect God's image in the world and it is the gracious work of the Spirit through Word and sacrament. This is most certainly true.

But it is also true that as a leader and teacher of God's Word, you are accepting responsibility as a role model. As you step into this position, recognize the importance of your witness, words, and actions. You bear responsibility in representing your church as a leader.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (1 Corinthians 5:20)

Remember the name and image you bear as you step into this small spotlight.

Hear God urgently warn believers to turn from sin because he does not want his children to fall into danger. God knows that Satan's temptations are working to destroy faith and separate souls from God for all eternity.

When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)

Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:11-14)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Colossians 3:5-6)

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:21-22)

God also does not want his children to dishonor or discredit his name.

You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.' (Romans 2:23-24)

As you grow in faith and knowledge, the Spirit may urge you to address a specific sin in your life. You may become more aware of sinful thoughts, words, or actions. The word "sin" means to miss the mark—and the standard is God's perfect holiness. God's call to repentance doesn't mean you are just sorry for your sins, the word "repentance" means you turn away and go in a different direction.

Don't dismiss the prompting of the Spirit in addressing sin. Resist the temptation to excuse or downplay the seriousness of your sin. See the danger.

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)

This is where you cling to God's Word.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15-16)

Your life of obedience and struggle against sin does not secure your salvation in any way—but don't ever forget God's warning to Cain.

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it. (Genesis 4:7)

Beware of the slippery slope of sin. Satan wants to rule you and keep you from eternal life with God. Satan wants to hurt the church and destroy believers.

Honestly—if you are struggling with a sin you should talk to your pastor.

That statement bears repeating.

If you are struggling with a sin you should talk to your pastor.

Everyone struggles with sin, but there are times it is best to wait before you step into a position of leadership. It doesn't mean you can't ever teach—it means you should talk to your pastor first and let him guide you. Such actions reflect a selfless heart that desires what is best for the kingdom.

Perhaps these words of Isaiah will help you understand the danger.

*This sin will become for you
like a high wall, cracked and bulging,
that collapses suddenly, in an instant.
14 It will break in pieces like pottery,
shattered so mercilessly
that among its pieces not a fragment will be found
for taking coals from a hearth
or scooping water out of a cistern. (Isaiah 30:13-14)*

As a Bible study leader, continue to examine your life and seek God's wisdom in Christian living. This is not a burden or expectation in ministry. It is the desire of your heart as you love the Lord and bear his image in thankfulness.



Scripture For Leaders To Study

The following books, chapters and letters will be especially helpful to you as you serve your church.

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John
- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus chapters 1 & 2
- Proverbs 31



Search Your Heart

Pray with King David,

Search me, God, and know my heart;

test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ *See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)*

Test me, Lord, and try me,

examine my heart and my mind. (Psalm 26:2)

As you wrestle with Christian living, there are times a sister or brother in Christ may help you see areas of weakness. Stay humble and trust God to guide you through the Word.

Earlier in this training, you learned about worship and liturgy. In worship, a common liturgical response to the sermon includes King David's beautiful words from Psalm 51.

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

¹¹ *Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.*

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

¹³ *Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.*

¹⁴ *Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.*

¹⁵ *Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise. (Psalm 51:10-15)*

Work To Build Love and Unity

You do not continue this pattern of Christian living alone. You have a family in Christ surrounding you with support and encouragement. Paul expressed the richness of this gift repeatedly in his letters to the New Testament churches.

I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-6)

Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:2-4)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)

Paul paints a strikingly deep picture of how believers are yoked together in fellowship. Along with their joy and laughter there is commitment, support, and self-sacrifice. People are passionate about the gospel in a way that values, recognizes, and engages the gifts of others—it is never selfish. Like God's perfect love, it longs to bless and benefit others.



God's Agape Love

Agape is the special word for love in Scripture that captures God's love for humanity demonstrated by the sacrifice of his only Son.

"Agape" is a self-sacrificing love that serves and blesses others. It selflessly works for the benefit of others and does not expect anything in return. It is the highest love in Scripture—and it is the love you are called to reflect.

God is agape [love]. (1 John 4:8)



Other Words for Love in the Bible

The Bible uses three other unique words that are translated as “love” in English. These words reflect different types of relationships.

- **Phileo** is the love between friends (it reflects friendship—you may know the city of “Philadelphia” is named after this brotherly love).
- **Eros** is the love between and a man and a woman (it is a sexual love—it is the root for the English word “erotic”).
- **Storge** is the love of family (it is a love shared by parents, children, grandparents, or siblings).

You have partners in Christ who love you. They are praying and laboring with you so that Christ will be proclaimed. Seek out those believers, invest yourself in friendships and learn from them. Enjoy the rich blessing of Christian fellowship—it is personal, meaningful, and beneficial.

Those who share your faith and passion for ministry are not simply extra hands to lighten the work load. These partners in Christ are fellow-laborers who understand the importance and purpose of gospel work—they bear the weight of responsibility and stand together in the struggles of hardship and disappointment. They urge one another on to love and good deeds.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:9-10)

Scripture is filled with accounts of believers who worked together with personal, loving relationships to build God’s kingdom. The accounts of God’s people in the Old Testament is similar to the disciples of the New Testament—they are people who nurture, encourage, and equip one another with the Word of God.

You are familiar with the word “disciple.” A disciple is someone who follows another to be taught. In Christianity, it means to be taught or “discipled” in the teachings of Christ. Today, the church doesn’t use the same words to talk about discipleship but it continues to make disciples of Christ!

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Today, we commonly use the word “mentor” rather than “disciple.” Believers are mentored as they encourage one another with the Word of God and talk about it. Mentoring shapes thinking and behavior—you can see it in the Biblical account of Naomi mentoring Ruth or Elizabeth mentoring Mary.

The work of discipleship or mentoring continues whether you are in or out of the classroom. Your teaching and influence extend far beyond what you can imagine and the Spirit works in ways you will never know. Teaching and mentoring go hand in hand—and they will drive you to your knees in humility at the opportunity to share Christ with others.

In this rich rhythm of spiritual life, you will find yourself at the beginning of Lesson 1, learning about God’s redeeming love story in Scripture. You will be nurtured by the sacraments and taught by your pastor. The response of Christ-centered, thankful living presented in Lesson 2 will continue to bless you and build your love for Christ and his church. It will draw you back to Lesson 1 with a longing for the redemptive love story and compel you again to live for Christ.

To God be the glory!



Activity: Hear God Speak About Your Holy Life

It’s your turn to Hear God Speak About Your Holy Life.

Step One: Learn how God wants you to respond to the law. Write down the ways you have failed to live the 3rd Commandment, given by God in Exodus 20:8, “*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*” This reflection will lead you to admit your guilt—don’t minimize your guilt—just confess it.

Step Two: Living in the grace of Christ, make a list of what you can do to follow the 3rd Commandment. Identify small, specific steps you will work toward as you live in the example of how Jesus showed love for God’s Word.

Step Three: List the name of one or two people who are good role models for you to live the 3rd Commandment. Express your appreciation for their example and encouragement. List two ways that they demonstrate a love for God’s Word.

LEARN ABOUT SPIRITUAL FRUIT AND GIFTS

Introduction

As the Holy Spirit continues to build your faith through the Word and sacraments, he will also bear fruit in your life and guide you in Christian living. Jesus told his disciples, *"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."*⁵ *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing"* (John 15:4-5).

For the purpose of this training we will use these definitions:

- The gift of the Holy Spirit gives believers the gift of faith.
- The fruit of the Spirit is the Christian character produced in believers.
- Spiritual gifts are the special abilities given to equip believers for service.



The Gift of the Holy Spirit is Faith. Fruits of the Spirit and Spiritual Gifts Are Given to All Believers.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is faith, and he dwells in the heart of every believer. The assurance of his presence is given in the Word—no extraordinary experiences are needed to affirm this truth.

His divine presence will bear fruit in all Christians. Though every person is different, God's Spirit will produce fruits of faith.

Spiritual gifts are special abilities given to believers for service. The apostle Paul wrote, *"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines"* (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Read and digest the following Scripture passages with the zeal of Jeremiah at your side, *"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight"* (Jeremiah 15:16).

*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.*⁴ *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,*⁵ *so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*⁶ *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;*⁷ *if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach;*⁸ *if it is to*

encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:3-8)

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

What is a Spiritual Gift?

(See the appendix for a complete Bible study on spiritual gifts).

There are several familiar passages in Scripture about the gift of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts—but a careful study will explain how each of them are unique.

- **The gift of the Spirit** brings believers into the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us, “*For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*” (also see Acts 2:38-39). In his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, Luther emphasizes that your call to faith is the work and power of the Spirit. “The Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”
- **The fruit of the Spirit** is described in Galatians 5:22-23, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

²³*gentleness and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23). God depicts his image in the renewed character of believers as the Holy Spirit does his work. The Spirit shines through your life to reflect the love, joy and peace of God.

- **Spiritual responsibilities** are given to all believers. Every Christian has a responsibility to serve (Galatians 5:13), encourage (Hebrews 10:25), teach (Colossians 3:16), give (1 Corinthians 16:2), witness (Acts 1:8), show mercy (James 2:15, 16), and grow in knowledge and wisdom (2 Peter 3:18; James 1:5).
- **Spiritual gifts** are given in differing amounts with varying combinations to equip believers for service. These Spirit-given aptitudes, or gifts (charisma) come from one place, "*All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines*" (1 Corinthians 12:11). His unique gifts are prepared and tailored to fit each unique individual, they are given to "*each one.*"
- **Natural talents** are given to Christians and non-Christians.

God places a high value on the variety of gifts he gives. However, it is not only the gift that is valued, but especially you who belong and are chosen to use the gifts.



A Definition and Examples of Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are the special, God-given abilities that equip believers for service.

Examples of spiritual gifts include, but are not limited to:

- Prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy (Romans 12:3-8).
- Healing, helping, guiding, and speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:27-31).
- Speaking and serving (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Why Does God Give Spiritual Gifts?

God's purpose in giving gifts is expansive and generous, "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain*" (Psalm 139:6). Therefore God reveals his intentions to guide you in using your spiritual gifts. These are just a few of God's divine and eternal purposes:

1. Glorify God

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:8)

2. Common good and service to others

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4:10)

3. Build up the church

So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church. (1 Corinthians 14:12)

As you continue your work as a Bible study teacher, remember God's intentions for your gifts.

How are Spiritual Gifts to Be Used?

God's Word also provides encouragement about how he intends his gifts to be used. Scripture gives general and specific guidance:

1. Use them fully and diligently

We have different gifts, according to the grace God has given us. If the gift is prophecy, do it in complete agreement with the faith. ⁷ If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach. ⁸ If it is encouraging, then encourage. If it is contributing, be generous. If it is leadership, be diligent. If it is showing mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:6-8)

2. In unity

Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

¹³ *This is to continue until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ.* ¹⁴ *The goal is that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray.* ¹⁵ *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we would in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.* ¹⁶ *From him the whole body, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows in accordance with Christ's activity when he measured out each individual part. He causes the growth of the body so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:3, 13-16)*

3. With respect for others

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one mind. ³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves.* ⁴ *Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)*

So by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought, but think in a way that results in sound judgment, as God distributed a measure of faith to each of you. ⁴ *For we have many members in one body, and not all the members have the same function.* ⁵ *In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." (Romans 12:3-5)*

Be refreshed daily in the use of your gifts by remembering the grace you received in your baptism. All your service will have this Christ-centered motivation. Using God's gifts for his purpose and according to his guidance sets you on a path of grace to serve in harmony with others—honoring their gifts even above your own.



What Should You Watch Out For As You Use Spiritual Gifts?

As you respond to the gospel with fruitful, Christian living, don't be caught off guard when your sinful nature raises its ugly head—it is "*crouching at your door; it desires to have you*" (Genesis 4:7).

Satan, the world and your flesh will try to reduce the purpose of your service and God-given gifts to something small and self-centered. It will produce envy, jealousy, pride, or self-pity as you seek to grow spiritually and serve in God's kingdom.

Struggle against these temptations by immersing your heart and mind in the Word of God—especially in these verses about spiritual gifts.

Your love for God's Word and your gift of teaching are both blessings that God wants you to use! These important gifts are valued in Scripture, nurtured and built up in worship, and engaged with humility and respect.

Gifts are also meant to be used with confidence. When asked to lead a Bible study or use your gifts in any other way, don't look within yourself but keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and his promises. Psalm 139:13-16 declares,

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;*

your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.

¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you*

when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed body;*

all the days ordained for me were written in your book

before one of them came to be.

God has designed and knit you together with gifts—you are fearfully and wonderfully made to live what has been ordained for you! Prayerfully consider the invitation to serve as a teacher of the Word. Recognize the commitment and responsibility that come with teaching the Word, but don't be afraid. You have gifts to serve others, and you are not alone. Your pastor will guide you, the church will support you, and the kingdom has work to be done. God himself dwells within you.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to give you peace, not disaster, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)



Looking for Confidence?

Your confidence as a Bible study leader comes from the strength and direction of God. You are a priceless vessel that simply overflows with his powerful truths and loving mercy.

God's plan for Bible study leaders is clear: diligently learn the Word, receive guidance from your pastor, serve with the support of your congregation, and humbly teach Scripture.

God's Spirit will make it powerful and effective.

It is also important to ask and understand how the use of your gifts and Bible study teaching fit into your congregation's ministry. Remember the love and value God gives to his bride, the church? He wants her to grow! God nurtures his people through Word and sacrament administered in worship. Your service is an extension of your church's ministry. You are there to intentionally connect your Bible study participants with your pastor and congregation where they will continue to grow.

Make the effort to learn about your congregation's mission statement. Seek out leaders to show you how the various arms of ministry fit together following one mission. There is benefit to understanding the goals and how those goals are reached by others.

Understand the overall plan of teaching the Word and how your teaching complements what others are doing and have done. There may be a long-standing history of women's Bible study in your church, or it may be a new opportunity. Either way, there are foundations in place to support what you are doing. Your church's leadership can offer encouragement, validation, financial support and the authority of the church. These are blessings that come from being part of your congregation's ministry.

As you ponder the invitation to use your gift of teaching, ask your pastor and leaders about training opportunities. The wisdom and help of the church is available if struggles or difficult situations arise in your study group. The encouragement and appreciation of Christ's body is sincere. Your willingness to eagerly learn and partner will strengthen your working relationship to the glory of God.

Join with the church as she prays for and with one another. Pray that God would bless others in the use of their gifts with the words from Hebrews 13:20-21:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.



Activity: Learn About Spiritual Gifts

It's your turn to Learn About Spiritual Gifts.

Step One: Explain the difference between the gift of the Spirit and spiritual gifts. Select one or two of the spiritual gifts listed in the Bible passages from this lesson and describe several ways this gift is apparent and a blessing to the church.

Step Two: In Luke 10:38-42, the account of Mary and Martha provides an important lesson about serving. It shows us the sharp contrast in a struggle that is common to many of us. Discuss what happens when you make your service the priority over listening to your Savior. How does this story reflect the struggles and priorities in your life? Is there a personal situation from your life that could use the encouragement and redirection that Jesus gives to Martha?

As they went on their way, Jesus came into a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who was sitting at the Lord's feet and was listening to his word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her serving. She came over and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me."

⁴¹ The Lord answered and told her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Step Three: List two or three things that you like doing or do well (you don't have to think of them as "spiritual" gifts). How would your church or other believers be blessed if you do those tasks? Add to the list as you are able.

Your Turn to Respond With Fruitful, Christian Living

It's your turn to Respond With Fruitful, Christian Living.

Review and Exercises

Review the following exercises from this lesson. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section.

Pray Continually

- List several benefits of spending time in prayer at the end of Bible study.

Hear God Speak About Your Holy Life

- List the name of one or two people who are good role models for you to live the 3rd Commandment. Express your appreciation for their example and encouragement. List two ways that they demonstrate a love for God's Word.

Learn About Spiritual Gifts

- List two or three things that you like doing or do well (you don't have to think of them as "spiritual" gifts). How would your church or other believers be blessed if you do those tasks?

Lesson 3: Select the Best Bible Study



Is This the First Step?

Listen to needs and identify your audience

Learn about your audience and set goals

Consider style then review, evaluate, and select a Bible study

Introduction

No, this is not the first step. If you wanted to skip the earlier lessons and start here to select a Bible study and start planning, you should probably stop here. If you didn't hunger for the spiritual feast in Lesson 1 and Lesson 2, you are not ready to lead or teach women who are thirsty for living water and growth in the Word.

Lesson 1 encouraged and addressed your personal faith because preparation starts in your heart. You listen. You learn. You are filled. The private, intimate moments you have with God in the Word are what truly equip you to teach women with your words and actions. The fire, crucible, and joy of connecting with Christ in Scripture will humble and shape you to lead. The sacraments are given as powerful gifts to strengthen your faith.

Lesson 2 taught you about fruitful living in response to the gospel. Prayers are constantly whispered in your heart or spoken with transparency. Yielded hearts linger in the Word with a growing desire to reflect God's image and honor his name. Acts of service—seen and unseen—will adorn your life of faith.

With Lessons 1 and 2 burning in your heart, this lesson begins to specifically equip you to find the best Bible study for your group. You know the importance of finding the right study—and you know it isn't as easy as pulling an eye-catching book from a shelf.

But do you actually know how to find the right Bible study?

As you begin, you will find renewed appreciation for the spiritual guidance and encouragement of your pastor. Divinely called to equip you for service, your pastor's spiritual leadership is a gift designed by God to help you be a faithful Bible study teacher.

Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Ephesians 4:11-12)



The Gift of Your Pastor's Spiritual Leadership

Your pastor is called by God to serve your congregation as he proclaims the Word, administers the sacraments, and equips the body of Christ. His responsibilities include spiritual leadership, growth in the Word, accountability for souls, and much, much more.

You have been placed under his spiritual care to be nurtured, encouraged, and equipped for service. Flourish under his divinely appointed service, grow from his spiritual insights, and learn from his extensive knowledge of the Word. Receive the blessings of his spiritual leadership.

Before you meet with your pastor to discuss Bible study, it will help to outline some of your thoughts and ideas (long narratives are not your best option).

- If you are starting a new women's Bible study, the lessons in this module will be especially helpful with the planning and preparation. It will help you to see a mental map of the journey and get an idea of what you need as you begin.
- If you currently teach a Bible study group, you will be able to quickly work through the section on selecting an audience. But don't miss the importance of learning about your audience, setting goals, and establishing learning objectives for your Bible study group.

Pastors will have individual preferences of how to handle the planning, preparation, and conversations about your women's Bible study. Some pastors will give direct, specific guidance during the initial planning and throughout the process. Other pastors may be comfortable with your suggestions and encourage you to follow through with your ideas. Your pastor will determine what his leadership and involvement will look like in this process. Ask him how often he wants to meet, what information he needs, and how he would like to get updates.

What do you need? Be specific about what you need to avoid miscommunication. He is there to answer questions, train you, and teach you to be faithful to the Word. He is there to lead, direct, and support your service.



Make sure your communication and expectations are clear

God's kingdom work thrives as pastors and leaders work together with respect, love, good communication, and clear, common goals.

It helps to ask questions.

Make sure you understand your pastor's expectations and let him know specifically what you need from him.

- "Where could I learn more about the congregation's ministry goals before we meet to plan the next Bible study?"
- "Is there a congregational assessment/demographic study that would be helpful for me to review?"
- "Are there others who would like to participate in the planning or be mentored as a Bible study leader?"
- "I have noticed a few needs in my conversations with women, would you like me to send you those thoughts ahead of time, or can we discuss them when we set the goals for Bible study?"
- "Would you like me to bring suggestions I have for Bible study material, or what would you suggest?"
- "Would you like to go through the material together, or would you like to review it and then meet to give me feedback?"
- "How often would you like me to check in with you—and what information is most important to you?"
- "Do you have a preference for handling questions I can't answer? How would you like to respond to those questions?"
- "What is the most convenient way for us to communicate?"
- "Should the details for the bulletin/newsletter/media go to the secretary, or would you like them sent to you?"
- "Will you need the number of women attending recorded for a statistical report?"
- "Are there any concerns you would like me to be aware of?"
- "Do you have any suggestions or advice on how I could be a more effective or faithful teacher?"

Don't forget to express your appreciation for his faithful service.

LISTEN TO NEEDS AND IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Listen to the Needs of Others

Before you identify the groups of women you will invite to Bible study, listen carefully to learn about the needs of others.

Filled with genuine love for your sisters in Christ, you will be concerned about the burdens and temptations women face in their daily lives. Because of sin, there are always problems that need to be addressed, healed or fixed. You know the needs of your sisters in Christ will not simply vanish when they come to Bible study. You also know the power of God's Word to strengthen those in need.

Make an intentional effort to visit with women, nurture relationships, and foster support in personal or spiritual matters. Listen to these women and pray for them. Keep their needs on your mind—their needs will shape your plans for Bible study.

Women may have an ongoing health issue, employment problem, or financial set back. Social, racial, and relationship trauma happens at home, online, or in church. People have real hardships that feel like the center of their universe.

Listen to their hearts because *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"* (Psalm 34:18).

The words of others may also betray a growing root of sin. The deceit of wealth, greed, and bitter resentment give evidence to faith that is choking or weak. Disrespectful, selfish attitudes spill over from prideful hearts.

Listen to their words, *"for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of"* (Luke 6:45).

Reflect as you listen. What burden does a woman carry that seems like a barrier to the hope of Christ? Where do her thoughts wander? What worries her? What influences are vying for a position of authority? What blinds her from the truth?

For the purpose of this training, we will talk about attentive listening to identify the needs of others—though sometimes it can be hard for people to understand and articulate their needs. God wants to speak to women about their needs through his Word—he wants to draw them to himself. Listen carefully as you consider who might come to hear his truth and what they need to hear.

Attentive listening means you will talk less and listen more. Proverbs 18:2 condemns fools who *"find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions."* Use your words to ask questions rather than react, state opinions, or tell your own story.

Listen to understand.

- “It sounds like...”
- “Tell me more about that...”
- “Is that something you need help with?”
- “What can I be praying for?”
- “Have you talked to pastor about that?”
- “How are you holding up?”
- “How is that effecting your faith?”

Some of the needs you identify may move the congregation to begin a new ministry outreach, intercede with prayers, or start a Bible study. This opportunity begins with concerned, attentive listening. It is filled as believers engage to reach out with the message of the gospel and demonstrate God’s love.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.
(John 13:35)*



What About Social Issues and Needs?

There are many real social issues and needs that bind believers with debilitating fear, frustration, or concern. It is important to discuss those problems with your pastor and let him find the best balance between the social needs that are present and the congregation’s mission of proclaiming the gospel.

Compelled by love, you may find that addressing earthly needs can be a stepping stone to share God’s love and his plan of salvation in Christ. To learn more about this balance, read “[Church—Mission—Ministry](#)” by [Armin Schuetze](#), published by Northwestern Publishing House.

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:15-16)

You may also have important conversations with spiritually mature women who long for an in-depth study of Scripture. They marvel with Paul, “*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*” (Romans 11:33). Some believers want to learn about the Bible with a grasp of God’s Word that broadly understands its purpose yet lingers over specific words with rich insights. They want to understand the history, context, and Christ-centered truths of Scripture.

These women might ask:

- “How can I learn the Bible so well that it becomes the source of all I think, do and say?”
- “How can I learn about passages that will strengthen me in times of need and equip me to encourage others with the Word?”
- “How can I learn the history and context of these Scripture verses so I clearly understand how to apply them to my life?”
- “How can I learn to let Scripture interpret Scripture or distinguish law and gospel? Where can I practice that?”

You will find that women have a very broad spectrum of needs. Pray about them.



Is Your Congregation Already Working to Meet Any of These Needs?

If your congregation already has ministry efforts in place to meet some of the needs you have identified, it would be best to promote those efforts rather than start something new.

Identify Your Target Audience

With conversations swirling in your head, it may seem impossible to list the needs of new and mature believers, single and married women, mothers, seniors, and everyone else that falls between the cracks. How do you know who to serve?

Your view from 30,000 feet will give you the opportunity to see who is missing. Look carefully and prayerfully consider who could be served by your Bible study. Consider how a Bible study could address the needs you learned about.

1. Are there women who need patient love and Christian support because they don't know what they need?
2. Are there women who feel stuck because they can't see past what they need? (Whether this is a real or perceived need, they still feel stuck).
3. Are there women who need special encouragement because of a difficult situation or hardship?
4. Are there women who will come to Bible study just to meet their social needs?
5. Are there women who need to deepen their connection to the congregation and feel a sense of belonging?
6. Are there women who need Christian fellowship?

7. Are there women who would be interested in learning more about Jesus?
8. Are there women who need to learn basic Bible stories?
9. Are there women with a deep desire to learn the rich truths of Scripture?
10. Are there women who would be encouraged by cross-generational or cross-cultural ministry?
11. Are there women who cannot attend Bible study because of a learning disability, language barrier, or illness?
12. Are there women who have a friend they could invite to Bible study?
13. Are there any needs that seem urgent?
14. Are there any needs that can be met by current ministry efforts?
15. Are there women who struggle to feel welcome at Bible study?

These are some of the needs and groups to keep in your prayers. Ask God to help you know which group you should serve—this will become your target audience.



Why Is A Target Audience Important?

When you try to meet the needs of everyone you rarely meet the needs of anyone. A target audience helps you specify the group of people you hope to serve. This will help you make decisions in Bible study planning as you evaluate what is best for the particular group you intend to teach.

But there are also times Bible study planning begins with a blank piece of paper and a desire to find those who are underserved. This audience is identified in the early stages of planning with a broad assessment of women and opportunities. How do you find women to invite to Bible study? A formal assessment is not always required but it helps to know the demographics of your area.



Understanding Demographics

A demographical study provides statistical data about a group of people in a particular area. It can tell you about unemployment rate, education level, race, family structure, native language. . . almost anything you would want to know. This analytical data can be helpful as congregations evaluate ministry and outreach opportunities.

www.data.census.gov will allow you to type in your zip code to access free reports from the United States Census.

The appendix includes a list of people groups you might consider serving as you analyze your demographics or review a congregational assessment.

If you use a demographical study to your identify target audience, you will gain many insights that will help you tailor your Bible study to a specific group.

1. Age, race, culture, or family makeup could direct you to consider a topic that is especially important or relevant.
2. Education level, language barriers, and communication styles would shape the teaching level or style of your Bible study.
3. Special needs or disabilities must be considered especially when serving those who have physical needs or learning limitations.
4. The spiritual background of participants will determine how many Old Testament references or Lutheran teachings you should use.
5. Responsibilities such as work or family would guide your decision about the day of the week or time of the day for your study.
6. Generational or people group data will help you understand possible philosophies, communication styles, or expectations.

At this point you have compassionately listened and prayerfully identified many needs and several groups that could be served. The input of a few other women will be helpful as different perspectives provide good thoughts for consideration.

Invest yourself in a team approach to identify needs and groups for Bible study. A “my ministry” mindset diminishes and undermines the God-pleasing ministry partnership he wants you to have with your congregation. Resist plans and ideas that are just interesting to you or simply convenient.



What Do the Pastor and Congregational Leaders Think?

Your pastor may suggest a group for your study, or perhaps he has worked through this process with you. Other pastors may appreciate the time you spend gathering information for this important decision.

Follow the direction of your pastor and congregational leaders as you identify the target audience for your Bible study. Work with them to consider the big picture as they lead the ministry of the congregation.

The last step in this process is to work with your pastor to prayerfully finalize your target audience. Then write down every person that might fit into this group. Ask other women if they know of someone that fits your target audience. Continue to pray for these women and others who may attend your Bible study.

Now you have identified your target audience.



Activity: Listen to Needs and Identify Your Audience

It's your turn to Listen to Needs and Identify Your Audience.

Step One: Write out and memorize two key questions that will help you learn about someone who might attend Bible study. (If you are able, role play a conversation with at least one of those questions)

Step Two: List several unique needs of a group who wants in-depth Bible study. How would their needs be different and what is required to meet those needs?

Step Three: Practice using demographics as you consider what you may know about young, stay at home mothers. What needs might they have? Evaluate the ways Bible study may—or may not—answer those needs.

LEARN ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE AND SET GOALS

Though you have a target audience, you still need to learn more as you work to set goals and select a study. Your next step will be to receive feedback from your target audience. Their input will provide direction and buy-in as they feel a sense of investment or ownership in the Bible study. A concise and effective survey can clarify specific needs and help you plan logistics. Other times you will find that personal conversations provide the information you need.

Learn About Your Target Audience

Some Bible study groups begin as women at church build Christian friendships. These women eagerly look for the spiritual growth and fellowship found in Bible study—and you may be friends with many of these women.

Yet you still want to take time to learn about their spiritual background and understand their story. What has shaped or influenced their faith? What teachers or relationships have guided them? What is their greatest influence now? When you understand these things it will guide you to communicate God's truth more clearly. Continue to nurture those relationships and build trust with one another.

But it is also possible that you won't know your audience. What shapes and drives their thinking? Scripture demonstrates the benefit of understanding others—and how the Spirit uses those insights to connect people. Listen to the apostle Paul:

People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. (Acts 17:22-24)

Paul did his homework. He paid attention to the culture and worship in Athens so he could understand the people and speak to their spiritual need. You can follow his example by listening to people attentively and understanding how they think.

Give careful thought to how people communicate because words mean different things to different people. What you think you say may not be what they hear.

Think about "baby-boomers" and "millennials" for a moment. These terms refer to people born in specific a time frame—but you know they refer more directly to the comparable traits, needs, and characteristics of their generation. Very simply—if you serve a specific group of people, you need to learn more about them.

Talk with your pastor about the group you plan to teach so you are prepared to connect and communicate well with a variety of people. Challenges with diversity and communication are not limited to age or culture—you may have varying political opinions, values, or social standing in your group. Some talk to think, and others think to talk. One woman is confident and outspoken while another is insecure and quiet. How can you reach them all with God's Word of truth?

Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say. (Exodus: 4:12)



Uniting the Body of Christ

There are many ways for you to reflect on the diversity of your group. Demographical studies show social data. A personality assessment shows strengths and weaknesses. Social media reflects a person's interests and values. There are many ways to see how women are different, what they need, and how they think.

Appreciate and rejoice in God's unique design of each person! But never forget Paul's powerful words in Colossians 3:14, "*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*"

Your task as a Bible study leader is to unite all the participants in and through the Word of God. The messages of law and gospel are great equalizers. We are all sinners and all are equally forgiven and saved. Draw your Bible study group together in Jesus. The faith they share as believers far exceeds any differences they have. God unites them in humility and fellowship through Scripture.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)

Utilize Surveys and Conversations to Receive Input

You have begun to learn about your target audience, but there is more input you can receive that will help before you begin logistical planning. These important steps will help in the next stage of planning:

- Build support and get women on board to create interest. Help women see how they will fit in and how Bible study will be a blessing to them personally. Consider how to create ownership for the participants. Listen for ways you can improve the Bible study.
- Get input from your target audience about the best day, time, length, and frequency for Bible study. Does the group want homework assignments or extra reading material? Should you meet at church, a restaurant, or in homes? Is daycare needed?
- Since you will soon set ministry goals, it will help to ask women what they hope to get out of Bible study. This question will provide you with great insights. Consider their input as you set ministry goals.

A survey may be the easiest way for you to gather this information.



The Difference Between a Demographical Study and a Survey

You learned that a demographical study identifies groups of people.

A survey can be used with your target audience. It would ask individuals for their input regarding a Bible study. Surveys allow you to get solid information about what works best for people and what they need.

The appendix includes several resources to help survey your Bible study group:

- Four Ways to Survey a Bible Study Group
- Four Tips When Surveying a Bible Study Group
- Ten Sample Questions for Bible Study Surveys
- Two Bible Study Surveys

Other women will find that conversations or e-mails are the easiest way to gather this information. The logistical plans will begin to take shape throughout the next steps. The end of Lesson 4 covers a complete list for logistical planning.

Set Ministry Goals for Your Bible Study

With feedback from your target audience, the next critical step is to set goals for your Bible study. For the purpose of this module, think of goals in terms of ministry goals. The ministry goals you set will answer the question, “What blessings do you hope the Spirit provides through this Bible study?”

These ministry goals are not the learning objectives for the study (you’ll learn about those later), these are the overarching goals you hope to see when the study ends or as it continues. Here are some samples of ministry goals you might set:

- Create a community of women who gather around the Word.
- Increase the amount of time women spend reading the Word.
- Strengthen the connection women have with their church or each other.
- Nurture, mentor, and develop new leaders or Bible study teachers.
- Provide an in-depth study that examines the Bible with mature believers.
- Teach Scripture to correct a Biblical misunderstanding or address a problem.
- Create a Bible study group that addresses this unmet need: [identify it].

Ministry goals for a more advanced study group might include an introduction to the writings of the early church fathers or a familiarity with materials like Luther’s Large Catechism or the Augsburg Confession. You may want to linger in topics like sanctification, the Trinity, or creation.

Another excellent in-depth study would be an introduction to apologetics. Apologetics requires considerable training in Scripture—and it demands excellence in speaking and listening.



What Are Apologetics and What Is an Apologist?

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15)

“**Apologetics**” is a clear, methodical defense of truth.

An “**apologist**” is one who defends or explains their beliefs and helps renew the thinking of others.

In Philippians 1:7 Paul writes, “*In my defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all share in this grace with me.*” The word “apologetics” comes from the Greek word translated “*defense.*”

Learn More About Apologetics



If you are interested in learning more about getting involved in conversations about Christ, consider reading Mark Paustian's excellent books, [Prepared to Answer](#) and [More Prepared to Answer](#) from NPH.

There are many valuable Bible study goals that could serve your congregation. Those goals might be met by anything from an apologetics training to a women's social event. Talk to your pastor about the ministry goals you are considering to determine how they fit into the mission statement of the congregation. Do they line up with the current goals for the congregation? What is the best fit? This is where you may also discuss any feedback regarding goals from the survey, or thoughts you have gathered from conversations.



A Comparison to See the Importance of Bible Study Goals

- One Bible study leader is planning to go through the book of Philippians because her friend recommended a great book. The bulletin announcement reads,
 "Women's Bible study on Philippians will be Tuesdays at 7pm."
- Another Bible study leader has noticed that women in the congregation feel disconnected and aren't sure their service has spiritual value. A few young moms are exhausted and overwhelmed—they are discouraged because their faith isn't radiant and joyful. After praying and talking to the pastor, three goals are set. The bulletin announcement reads,
 "Women's Bible study will meet on Tuesdays at 7pm. Join us as we work through the book of Philippians! You will learn to:
 - ✓ Strengthen your connection to other believers at church
 - ✓ Understand how God works in and through believers
 - ✓ Fight sin-driven guilt that condemns failure in joyful living

An invitation to study God's Word to meet needs and strengthen areas of weakness will draw more women to Bible study. They will inherently understand why they "need" to attend Bible study.

More importantly, you are training women to look to Scripture when they face hardship or need encouragement. This practice reinforces their need for the Word and sets a pattern of going to Scripture as the first and best resource for life.

Now that you understand the importance of setting goals, look at the big picture:

This is what you see: You have identified this.	This is your goal: You work toward this.	This is what you study: You'll look for this next.
Resentment toward those in a position of authority in the workplace, church, government, or home.	Increased appreciation and respect for those in authority. Lives that reflect God's good design of authority.	How God designed and uses authority as a blessing. Examples of how God used believers and unbelievers in positions of authority to bless his people. Trust in God's design, wisdom, and plans.
Confusion or uncertainty about the differences between Christian or Lutheran churches. Lack of interest, familiarity, or respect for important Biblical doctrines.	Unity, commitment, and understanding of key doctrinal issues and why they are important. Ability to explain basic doctrines and find the supporting passages in Scripture.	The creeds or Catechism. Material written to distinguish doctrinal differences. Biblical or historical accounts of believers led astray by false teachers. Judgment of false teachers/leaders.
Women who want to encourage other believers in times of difficulty or hardship. Women who want to walk by the side of someone who is suffering.	Familiarity with verses of comfort that will strengthen others. Know the Biblical accounts of believers who suffered or faced hardship and received strength.	A study of verses that offer encouragement and comfort in the Old and New Testament. Bible books (like Job, Ruth, or Philippians) that let you walk with believers who lived through hardship.
A hunger and thirst for a deeper understanding of Scripture. A place to ask difficult questions and learn how to apply difficult principles.	Opportunity to engage in deeper Bible study. Ongoing desire to study Scripture.	Books of the Bible with study notes from solid resources and reputable authors. People's Bible Teaching Lutheran Confessions

To start the process, take a big step back and remember the needs and audience you identified. Don't be overwhelmed by the immense needs or heavy burdens of the people you will serve. Look at what you know but don't try to be the solution to every problem. Remember what you have learned about those people.

Pray for wisdom and talk to your pastor as you:

1. Review or create a list of felt, perceived, or observed needs.
2. Analyze the feedback from the survey of your target group to consider common goals or needs not previously identified
3. Determine what goals would be beneficial and discuss them with your pastor or congregational leaders.
4. Establish ministry goals by answering the question, “What do I hope the Spirit will accomplish through this study?”

Now you can set ministry goals for the Bible study. Selflessly long for what will unite, build, and bless others—seek ministry goals that will best serve this group.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. (2 Kings 19:31b)

When you have determined the ministry goals for your Bible study, keep them handy and use them in a variety of settings. Don't lose sight of them as you move forward in your planning.

- Incorporate the ministry goals in your conversations and encourage women to see and tell others how this Bible study will help them.
- Use the ministry goals in your publicity and marketing materials (social media, personal invitations, bulletins, and newsletters).
- Integrate the ministry goals in your lesson plans and review them throughout your Bible study.



Activity: Learn About Your Audience and Set Goals

It's your turn to Learn About Your Audience and Set Goals.

Step One: Look at the two sample surveys in the appendix. Which survey would be best for your group and what changes would you make to the survey?

Step Two: Refer to the chart in this lesson on setting goals and focus on the first two columns, "This is What You See" and "This is Your Goal." Select two of the following scenarios and write out what you see—then write out suggested goals.

- Women in secular leadership who are struggling to let their light shine in a competitive work world where their faith is not respected.
- Elderly women who have lived faithful, quiet lives raising a family.
- Young high school or college women at your church that are facing decisions, temptations, and struggles in the journey to womanhood.

Step Three: Use the information below to write one social media post on each goal for the Bible study (one post for the first goal, one for the second goal, etc.).

"Women's Bible study will meet on Tuesdays at 7pm. Join us as we work through the book of Philippians and learn how to strengthen our connection to other believers at church, understand how God works in and through believers, and fight sin-driven guilt that condemns failure in joyful living."

CONSIDER STYLE, REVIEW AND EVALUATE, SELECT A STUDY

With your audience and goals intact, the next step is to select a style or format for the Bible study material.

What kind of Bible study are you looking for? As you are looking you will likely find a wide variety of materials that are close to what you are looking for—but don't quite hit the mark. This section will teach you about the options and how to make the best decision.

It may be very difficult to find a Bible study that addresses the exact goals you have identified. It is even harder if you are looking for a specific format or style. But a solid Bible study can be tailored to meet those needs by simply adding content. Many Bible studies are intentionally written to a general audience so they can be adapted easily to the needs of a specific group.

On the contrary, it is very challenging to work through a complex study and skip over difficult material. Participants will likely be confused. Bible studies that need corrections or clarifications are also more time-consuming and problematic. "Salvageable" is not a good option since confusion or misunderstanding can occur.

Invest your time to find the best Bible study material.

Your pastor will let you know how to work through the final steps of reviewing, evaluating and selecting a Bible study—it can be done several ways.

Consider the Best Style or Format for the Bible Study

With all you have invested to this point, it is important to remain diligent in considering what type of study to select. Here are some questions you should consider (or ask your participants about) to select the right style of Bible study.

- Do the participants have a language barrier? Consider having them bring a Bible in their native language.
- Are there participants that have diminished eye sight and need larger print? Could you find material that can be enlarged for them?
- Is the class intended to teach English as a second language with the Bible as a text? (These are called ESL classes—English as a Second Language).
- Are there any special needs that would influence the reading level or content of the Bible study? Remember to check out [WELS Special Ministries](#) or [Jesus Cares Ministries](#).
- Will all the participants be able to find Scripture references, or do you want the Scripture passages printed out? Be mindful of new believers who

may not be able to find references and can't keep up—but remember the importance of helping them become familiar with their Bible.

- Will participants be interested in video clips, video lessons, music, or additional media? Do you have the equipment to view it easily?
- Is there a specific time frame for the study that would require a minimum number of lessons or limit how many lessons you can cover? Do you need 6 lessons or 8 lessons? Can the lessons be covered in the 60 minutes or 90 minutes you have set for Bible study?
- Do you expect women to attend regularly or might attendance be sporadic? Consider how easily participants will be able to jump into a study if they have missed a lesson—perhaps independent lessons would be easier for participants who have varying schedules.
- Are the participants willing to purchase a Bible study book, or is there a budget to purchase materials? Be sure to ask—you may be surprised at the answer. Your pastor may know of a generous donor. Purchases may qualify for a bulk discount.
- Do participants want individual lessons printed each week or do they prefer the material collated in a binder? Lessons could be added weekly.
- Where do they want to write notes? Do they prefer a workbook style or a journal notebook? This could be as simple as a spiral notebook.
- Are participants willing to prepare for Bible study? If so, will it be required or just optional? How long will they need to prepare?
- Do participants want homework or reading assignments? If so, how long will they have for homework and what materials will they need?
- Is the theological level appropriate for your group? Consider familiarity with Biblical history, theological terms and principles or Lutheran theology—is it too deep or too shallow?

Now you have a clear list of what you are looking for—and not looking for. As you work to find a Bible study, consider everything you have worked on so far but remember that if you try to accomplish too much, you'll accomplish nothing.

Review and Evaluate with Discernment



The Difference Between a Review and an Evaluation

For the purposes of this training, we will use the following terms:

Review—a review includes perusing a variety of studies pertinent to the topic or needs of the target audience. It will likely include several styles or formats and will result in the choice of two or three suitable studies.

Evaluation—an evaluation is a theological examination that thoroughly compares the teaching of the study with Scripture and the teachings of the Lutheran Church. This will determine whether the study is suitable.

Now you are ready for the general review process as you look through a variety of materials and narrow down your selections. Then your final study choices will be evaluated to find the best Bible study.

At this point you need to clearly understand how your pastor wants to proceed. Follow his leadership and suggestions—this could happen in several ways:

- Your pastor may select the study.
- Your pastor may suggest several optional titles for you to review.
- Your pastor may point you to look for a study.
- Your pastor may evaluate a study you recommend.
- Your pastor may have you evaluate a study and assess your evaluation.

Your Pastor May Select the Study

Your pastor may have worked with you through this whole process and will let you know he has a Bible study that is a good fit for the group. If that is the case, count it a rich blessing and start studying!

Your Pastor May Suggest Several Options for Your Review

Your pastor may offer several titles for you to look at and suggest you review them. Look through the materials to see which resource best fits your group. Consider what you know about your audience, the goals you have set, and the style or format that would work well. Let him know which study you think is best.



Supplemental Material

Your pastor may also suggest supplemental resources related to your topic. He may help you find good illustrations, examples, or even videos that can help Scripture’s teaching be more effective and meaningful. Remember he may have maps or teaching resources to assist your group in learning. Keep those resources handy!

Your Pastor May Point You to Look for a Study

Your pastor may suggest you look for Bible study material at Northwestern Publishing House (NPH.net) or Concordia Publishing House (CPH.org). He may recommend that you look at a study of the People’s Bible or the People’s Bible Teaching series (see the appendix sample). He may steer you toward—or away from—a particular resource, author, or publishing company.

He may also recommend Bible study material posted by WELS Women’s Ministry. You will find free downloads of Bible studies that have been reviewed by reputable pastors and professors in WELS. There are a variety of topics, authors, and styles.

Your Pastor May Evaluate a Study You Recommend

Your pastor may be willing to evaluate a study that you recommend. When you are reviewing material to bring for his approval exercise your best judgment and give him an opportunity to see your love and respect for the Word. The next section on discernment will be especially helpful.

Your Pastor May Have You Evaluate a Study and Assess Your Evaluation

Your pastor may have you evaluate the material and share your assessment with him so you can grow in discernment. The skill of discernment is refined over time with much practice. Your pastor can work through your review to help you learn and grow.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15).

The discernment you exercise may have an eternal impact—don’t approach this responsibility casually.

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:15-16)

Discernment isn’t as simple as “Five Questions” but there are good evaluation tools to get you started. Wrestle with the concepts in these questions and consider

them carefully. An additional discernment tool can be found in the appendix.

Here are some questions to consider as you evaluate a Bible study:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the study?
2. Are passages or topics presented in the correct context?
3. Does it present doctrinal issues correctly?
4. Does it faithfully teach and interpret the truth of Scripture?
5. Will the questions reinforce Scripture or could the ensuing discussions lead participants away from what Scripture teaches?

**What Does “The Best” Material Look Like? It Has...**

- An emphasis on the gospel which clearly teaches God’s plan and work of salvation through Christ alone.
- A presentation of the law that does not distort or minimize sin and its consequences.
- A proper interpretation of Scripture which clearly presents God’s intended meaning.
- A clear message that God’s work of salvation in Christ is more important than our response of godly living and obedience.
- References to the Sacraments that are doctrinally correct and emphasize God’s work to create and strengthen faith through the means of grace.
- Directives to pray frequently and confidently without implying that God strengthens faith through prayer.

Finally, ask yourself “What is the key thought that women will remember as they go home?” Think about what will fill the hearts and minds of those who attend Bible study. Will they be filled with the love of Christ and joy of forgiveness? Will they be motivated by grace and guided to lives of humble thanksgiving? Or will participants feel burdened with guilt and consumed with a responsibility to be better Christians?

Select the Best Bible Study with Your Pastor

Your pastor is a well-trained teacher whose ability to review the strengths and weaknesses of the Bible study will be a blessing. Listen to his thoughts and evaluation of the material. Learn from his comments or his assessment of your evaluation. Gracefully accept redirection to greener pastures if needed.

Also remember that your pastor works to coordinate ministry. He knows the congregation’s priorities and long range plans. If his six-month plan includes a sermon series on the Apostles’ Creed he might direct you away from repeating a study on the same topic—or he might suggest that you plan a study that coordinates with the sermon series!

Pastors are involved in difficult situations behind the scenes. Since he knows about private frustrations, discussions, or personal situations, he may steer you away from a sensitive topic. And remember that he may not explain his reason to you as he protects the reputation of others. This is part of your trust and respect of his position—follow his counsel with a willing spirit.

Finally, there may be situations where your pastor has concerns about a lay-led Bible study or a women's Bible study—and he may have good reasons. Again, this is a time to demonstrate respect for your pastor and congregational leaders. There are many things going on in ministry that you aren't aware of. Be understanding, positive, and patient as your congregation sets its priorities for ministry. Trust God to work through the leaders at your church.



Thoughts From a Pastor For a Pastor

God gives pastors the responsibility to train and equip members for ministry. If a woman is willing and interested in leading women in a Bible study, that seems to be a win-win, not only for ministry but also for getting people involved.

Instead of seeing it as another item on an already busy schedule, you have an opportunity to equip someone to carry out ministry so ministry efforts are doubled and the work load is reduced. It is certainly within the scope of work that God gives to pastors. What a blessing from God! It will require work and effort but it is something that God can certainly bless.

It is a joy to equip a saint, walk her through Scripture, and equip her to teach well.

Perhaps an area women's Bible study with other WELS congregations could be considered. Continue to look for ways to serve and seek solutions that bless your congregation's ministry or perhaps include a broader area.



Area WELS Women's Bible Study

An area women's Bible study can be a good solution for many congregations. One pastor or a circuit pastor is designated to oversee the Bible study and work with the Bible study teacher. The Bible study is promoted in surrounding WELS churches and all women are invited.

At this point some pastors and congregations may want a written request or proposal that can be submitted for approval as an official ministry of the congregation. If a proposal or report is requested, use the information you have gathered through this process as your formal proposal or report.

You can include:

- The target audience and needs of the group.
- The ministry goals set for the Bible study.
- The logistical planning (day, time, length, frequency, start and end dates).
- The approved materials to be covered.
- The name(s) and contact information of those who are teaching the study.

Some congregations may also want reports submitted for quarterly or annual voter's meetings. This information can be especially helpful as the congregation reviews Bible study attendance (this information is submitted to the Synod as part of a statistical report). It also keeps the congregation see the vital role of women's Bible study as a part of their ministry.



Activity: Consider Style, Review and Evaluate, Select a Study

It's your turn to Consider Style, Review and Evaluate, Select a Study.

Step One: Explain the advantages of adding content to a simple Bible study, or explain the disadvantages of using a more complex study that may have errors.

Step Two: Practice reviewing material by selecting the top two titles from this imaginary list of Bible studies. Explain your choices.

1. Being God's Woman
This dynamic study of Proverbs 31 will freshen your countenance and open new doors for you to serve God! Find the full life God wants you to have by walking in the shoes of this amazing woman.
2. Receiving Grace
God offers grace through Christ to believers who sincerely seek his face. Find the many ways God strengthens your faith as you live in the blessing of obedience. Open your heart to find his grace for you!
3. The Fruit of the Spirit
What does the fruit of the Holy Spirit look like and how do you know he will bear fruit in your life? Study Scripture to learn the purpose of God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Learn to confidently depend on his work in your life.
4. You Can Do All Things For Christ's Glory! (this has a pretty cover)
Learn about your personal mission and worth by listening to the Spirit. Find the power of God and be equipped for amazing opportunities. Ask and you will receive!
5. To the Unfaithful
This study of Hosea points to the faithful God who loves his people even when they are unfaithful. Learn about God's faithfulness, the unfaithfulness of God's people and the loving forgiveness God offers through Christ.

Step Three: If this were a page in a Bible study you were evaluating, what would you note?

Courageous Contagious Faith

As we consider the idea of being courageous and contagious in our faith we can readily think of the apostle Paul who richly embodied those characteristics throughout his life. His ministry, recorded in Acts, includes a ship wreck, a deadly snake bite, beatings, imprisonments, and more.

But we also see how his radiant faith touched the lives of those around him. Lost souls heard the message of Christ and believers came together to gather around the Word and sacraments for worship and fellowship.

Certainly the apostle Paul had a unique and exceptional calling in his ministry. It was not an easy life of ministry—and not one that we will be able to emulate. But there are lessons for us to learn as we rejoice in our brother's life of faith.

PART ONE - Paul's courage as he traveled

The three missionary journeys of Paul are found on the Bible maps (page 37).

1. Review the maps to note the areas covered by Paul's ministry. While much of Jesus' earthly ministry branched north, east, and south of Jerusalem, Paul traveled much further north and braved the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas to the west as he journeyed as far as Rome. He ventured into Asia Minor on missionary journeys for almost 11 years.
2. Read Acts 16-18 to follow Paul's second missionary journey.

Your Turn to Select the Best Bible Study

It's your turn to Select the Best Bible Study

Review and Exercises

Review the following exercises from this lesson. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section.

Listen to Needs and Identify Your Audience

- Practice using demographics as you consider what you know about young, stay at home mothers. What needs might they have? Evaluate the ways Bible study may—or may not—answer those needs.

Learn About Your Audience and Set Goals

- Use the information below to write one social media post on each goal for the Bible study (one post for the first goal, one for the second goal, etc.).
“Women’s Bible study will meet on Tuesdays at 7pm. Join us as we work through the book of Philippians and learn how to strengthen our connection to other believers at church, understand how God works in and through believers, and fight sin-driven guilt that condemns failure in joyful living.”

Consider Style, Review and Evaluate, Select a Study

- Explain the advantages of adding content to a simple Bible study, or explain the disadvantages of using a more complex study that may have errors.

Lesson 4: Prepare to Teach



Study Diligently to Teach

Study the Text Diligently

Plan Key Parts of The Lesson

Plan Logistics and Make Final Preparations

Introduction

The first three lessons have set a foundation of spiritual growth, fruitful living and prayerful planning to teach the Word of God. These lessons have combined the expertise of pastors and the wisdom of experienced Bible study teachers to establish several key steps as you prepare to teach God’s Word.

Lessons 1 and 2 are a vital tool that can be integrated into other ministries within the congregation. This is more than a pattern of preparation for Bible study—it can serve as a pattern for Christian living. It will equip you to share Christ and motivate you to share Scripture with others.

But as you continue the path of spiritual growth and begin teaching, there will be moments you feel inadequate as you realize how much you don’t know. Self-doubt wants to paralyze you and turn your focus inward. You may begin to second guess yourself. Maybe you will identify with Moses and his excuses.

*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?
(Exodus 3:11)*

Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them? (Exodus 3:13)

What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?' (Exodus 4:1)

Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue. (Exodus 4:10)

Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else. (Exodus 4:13)



Advice and Encouragement

Pastors and Bible study teachers were asked what advice they would offer to someone who is starting to teach God's Word. Here is what they said:

- You are not alone. You have the Holy Spirit within you and a pastor walking with you. Don't be overwhelmed.
- You are about to embark on something you will find spiritually enriching. Look at the blessings not the frustrations. This is a chance for you to grow in your faith.
- We are all priests in the universal priesthood. We can teach God's Word and not be ashamed, embarrassed, or concerned about our lack of knowledge.
- Begin every planning, preparation, and teaching session with a prayer that asks God to work through you for his glory.
- It's not about mastering knowledge—it's about meeting the God who loves you. If you feel there is too much to learn, you're thinking about yourself. Remember the spotlight is on God's redemptive love.
- A clear, correct focus on Christ takes the pressure off you.

Now you will learn how to prepare and study the lesson so you can explain Scripture correctly in context and make Biblical applications. Learn how to cross-reference other passages in Scripture—use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Let the law be the law—and let the gospel be the gospel.

Your diligent study time will increase your ability to articulate God's truth and draw women's thoughts in the right direction with good questions. With clear learning objectives your teaching will improve greatly and participants will have a solid understanding of what they have learned.

The final touches and details of planning will create seamless transitions and a productive learning environment. Lesson 4 will help you faithfully and effectively teach the Word as a living reflection of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4;7,13-15:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak,¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

STUDY THE TEXT DILIGENTLY

Your diligent study time will be patterned after the personal Bible study skills you learned in Lesson 1. Refer back to Lesson 1 regularly as you continue to grow in God's holy Word. The time and effort invested in preparation will be evident to your participants—the insights of your pastor will also enrich your teaching.

Without preparation it is easy to stumble in your teaching, miss the key points of the lesson and speak without clarity. Teachers need to know the material they teach. Good teachers know more than the material being presented. They understand why the truths of Scripture are essential.

Consider studying with one or two other women. This gives you a chance to discuss what you are reading and equips others to teach if you are unable. Mentoring others in this pattern of study is true discipleship. The blessings will be bountiful.

Your personal study time and preparation begin long before the Bible study actually starts. As soon as you have selected your target audience, goals, and the material for your class, you can begin to study—this could be weeks or months.

Set a regular time to study and prepare for Bible class. Don't procrastinate or just put it on your to-do list. This is time for you to be prepared by the Word as a teacher of Scripture and witness for Christ. It is not something that can be randomly added to your schedule when you find time. Set the time and do what you can to minimize the distractions.

Decide how you will take notes during your study. A journal might work—but you need an area to note important points, organize your information and remember the questions you want to ask your pastor. You need to identify and list the primary points—those will become learning objectives (the key points you teach). Some people like to highlight passages or take notes in their Bible, others do not. Do what works best for you. There is a sample worksheet page in the appendix if you need a printed outline to help you get started.

The format or style of the Bible study you chose may impact how you take notes and may already list the learning objectives.

Set up a study area with your materials: your Bible study material, your personal Bible, resource books, a place for notes and something to write with. Begin your study time with prayer.

- Thank God for grace. Rejoice that he has forgiven your sins, filled your heart and made you his child.
- Thank God for the gifts you have been given to serve him and the opportunity you have to teach his Word to others.
- Pray that God would open your heart to understand his truth as you study. Ask God to keep your thoughts clear, focused and faithful.
- Pray for the Spirit to give you wisdom and insights as you prepare the lesson. Pray that you handle the Word correctly.
- Pray for the women who are coming. Pray for God's blessing on their time in the Word, that they would be nurtured and equipped with grace, love and truth.
- Pray for the specific goals you have set for the women who are coming.

(Sample prayer)

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the grace you have so richly lavished upon me. It is my joy and privilege to be called your child. I praise you for the sacrifice of your Son which has paid my debt of sin and made me an heir of your kingdom.

I pray that you would strengthen me to humbly use my gifts and make the most of every opportunity to share your truth with others. As I prepare to teach your Word, fix my heart and thoughts only on the things that are true and right. Teach me your truth so I can nurture and encourage those around me.

Finally, Lord I pray for the women who will come to this study. Open their hearts with an eagerness for your Word and fill them with your Spirit. Bind their hearts to one another in love and bless them with a rich partnership as sisters in Christ. Amen.

Read the Bible Study Material With Your Bible Open

It is important to read through all the Bible study material you will cover. If you only read one lesson at a time you may lengthen Lesson 3 to add an important point then find that Lesson 5 thoroughly covers the subject. You need to know what is being covered in the material so you can say, "We'll talk about that more in Lesson 5" (or determine when to cover it).

After reading all the material, focus your attention on the lesson you will be teaching next. Read the Leader's Guide material and answer helps with your personal study Bible open.

These next steps of preparation will set your teaching apart and reflect the power and importance of the Word. These steps will draw your participants into Scripture rather than leaving them within the boundaries of the Bible study material. As you work through your Bible study material, find all the Scripture references in the material and look them up in your own Bible. Make notes about what you learn, follow the cross references and read those passages.

- Take notes that help you remember key points. Meditate on those thoughts.
- Highlight any key passages or words from the material.
- Find additional passages that support or give examples of the material being taught.
- Note any words or concepts that might need further explanation.
- Read the questions and consider whether they will be clear to your audience. Think about where the discussion might go as the participants respond. Rephrase or restate the question(s) if necessary. Write out key points that should be given in the answer (unless the questions are for discussion only).

You will look up many passages of Scripture in your preparation but extend your study to look up some of those passages in a commentary. It isn't necessary to look for a commentary on every verse, but look for the verses that speak most directly to the topic and read about them in a commentary.



Activity: Study the Text Diligently

It's your turn to Study the Text Diligently

Step One: Write a prayer to use when you begin your personal Bible study time.

Step Two: Refer to the section below from the People's Bible Teachings on Baptism and answer the following question: What Scripture references will you look up in your study Bible and what will you look for in the book of Titus since the passage is already printed out for you?

Baptism, which requires faith, also creates faith. Baptism is regenerative, which means it gives rebirth. Paul writes, "[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). We know this passage refers to baptism because baptism is the only washing the Lord has directed his church to use. Baptism is the washing of rebirth because through it the Holy Spirit creates faith, making us spiritually alive, and thus saves us (1 Peter 3:21). Rebirth, or regeneration, is essentially the bestowal of faith, for whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1, John 1:12,13).

Step Three: Referring to the same section (above), identify a word or two that might need an explanation or definition. Explain the ways you can research that word.

PLAN KEY PARTS OF THE LESSON

The key parts of the lesson should be well planned. Set a specific timeframe for each part to make sure the learning objectives are met in the allotted time.

Begin With a Review and an Introduction

Review the learning objectives or key points from the previous lesson. Concepts commonly build on one another or continue on a set path. The review helps participants connect information and see how the pieces fit together. Even if the lessons are independent, participants will benefit from reviewing material.

The introduction provides interest and motivation to the students. More importantly, it focuses attention on the lesson and learning objectives. It is important to show the participants how they will benefit from the lesson. Adult learners are especially responsive when you tell them why they should know something.

This is a great place to use stories or current events that will heighten the interest of participants. It is also a good place to broaden your presentation style to reach different types of learners. Consider a music clip, role playing, or a video introduction such as the Bible Project (you will want your pastor to review those materials).

Plan the Lesson With Learning Objectives in Mind

This training teaches you to plan lessons with clear learning objectives. You will list the best resources to clearly teach the objectives and determine how much (if any) extra material can be added to the Bible study you have chosen. You can review all this information with your pastor or a trained teacher to make sure your lesson plans are clear.

1. Determine the learning objectives.
2. Determine what material you will teach.
3. Use questions purposefully.

Determine Learning Objectives

Very simply, you can ask yourself, "What do I want participants to know at the end of this lesson?" What would participants say if you asked, "What's your takeaway from today?" What one thing do you want them to know even if they forgot everything else?

That is the learning objective.

Focus your teaching on that point (or points). If you don't specifically teach the point(s), your participants will be less likely to see them clearly.

Go back to the example from the previous lesson to see how you move from needs → to goals → to study material → and now to learning objectives.

This is what you see: You have identified this.	This is your goal: You work toward this.	This is what you study: You will study Genesis 1	These are your learning objectives:
Resentment toward those in a position of authority in the workplace, church, government, or home.	Increased appreciation and respect for those in authority.	Genesis chapter 1: How God designed and uses authority as a blessing.	See the design of authority established by God. See the purpose of authority established by God. See that authority was established before sin.

In this example, you would teach Genesis chapter one with a focus on your three learning objectives rather than teaching all the concepts in the chapter. There is much to learn from Genesis chapter one but you will point students to see the three learning objectives so you can meet the goal of your Bible study.

Determine What Material You Will Teach

With all the material you have read in preparation, you have a wealth of information, but you cannot teach it all. Now you have to decide what to teach. Cherish the blessed truths you learned (this is the great blessing of being a teacher) but exercise good judgment as you plan your class time.

Look at your learning objectives and determine whether any objectives will need additional time to explain. Plan your time carefully. Plot out how long you will spend on the review, introduction, and each section of the lesson as you address the learning objectives. Make sure you have time to cover all the material and adapt your plan if one section needs more time. It can be this simple:

6:30-6:40	6:40-6:55	6:55-7:10	7:10-7:25	7:25-7:30
Review and Introduction	Learning Objective 1	Learning Objective 2	Learning Objective 3	Closing and Prayer

You don't need to follow your time table to the minute but keep your eye on the clock so time doesn't slip away. Be strategic and intentional with your time.



The Special Blessing of Women's Bible Study

In planning your Bible study time remember the unique and wonderful blessings that come in women's Bible study.

Relationships are important to women and they enjoy lingering in conversation, especially around Scripture. They don't usually head straight for the answer but build relationships while making applications and sharing stories. They love the journey through the Word of God.

Make sure you allow time for this wonderful blessing. The Christian love and encouragement is amazing.

Use Questions that Serve the Learning Objectives

Give careful attention to the questions you ask. Make sure they serve a purpose and move you toward your learning objectives.

- **Leading questions:** Can you use leading questions to guide them to the answer? Can you respond to a question with a question that will point them in the right direction? Participants will remember the answers and learning objectives better if they come to the conclusion by themselves.
- **Response time:** How long will you wait for them to answer the question? Don't rush into the answer or change the question—if it is a well-planned question it is worth waiting for the answer.
- **Know the answer:** How specific does the answer need to be? Can it be a general answer or is there one exact answer or word?
- **Discussion questions:** Could your discussion questions cause any confusion or blur the truth of Scripture?
- **Develop your skill to redirect an incorrect answer with another question:** Can you help a participant answer more specifically or help them take another step to the correct answer?

You will learn more about using questions skillfully in Lesson 5.

Vary the Learning Styles to Heighten Engagement

You will likely teach in a way that reflects your personal learning style. If you learn best with step by step instruction, your lesson plans will reflect that strength—which is good because you do it well! It will come naturally.

But there will be other learners in your class and you need to learn how to adapt your teaching style to reach all types of learners. Look at your plans and ask:

- What will reach those who learn visually and aurally?
- How can you help those who learn systematically and benefit from step-by-step instruction?
- What experiences will help those who flourish with hands on learning? Can you plan an activity for those who learn by doing?
- Will the materials provide opportunities for participants to write and take notes? Will you have a time for learners to restate what they've learned?

Are you familiar with learning styles—and do you know your own learning style? You can learn about your learning style with a short quiz from [Rule the Room Train the Trainer](#). Learn about the learning styles of others and how to teach effectively to every learning style.

Curriculum expert Jason Teteak distinguishes four unique learning styles and their key traits. He suggests these top instructional design tools for each learning style:

- **Step Learner**
Follows steps and wants goals or practicality
Use tip sheets with quick, practical steps
- **Create Learner**
Synthesizes knowledge and wants to generate something
Use “your turns” and allow them to generate their own content
- **Research Learner**
Reads and studies; wants to debate or look at the big picture
Use a workbook they can read and refer to the table of contents
- **Talk Learner**
Rephrases to learn and thrives with verbal exchange
Use partner and group activities or engage a buddy system

Learn about new ways to teach. Strive to grow and expand your teaching style.

**Keep Learning About Teaching Methods and Styles**

Take time to research reputable learning institutions and look for ideas that may improve your teaching. Consider this example:

In the traditional lecture-based approach, students gain first exposure to new concepts by attending class and listening to lecture. While instructors expect students to do the reading in advance, preparation can be minimal: students know that the material will be covered in lecture.

Instructors assign homework for students to complete outside of class to practice and deepen their understanding of the material. Homework often exposes student questions and gaps in knowledge, but the instructor is not available to help students.

In the “flipped classroom,” class time is devoted to engaged learning. Students are actually doing the “homework” (practice, application, and analysis of concepts) in class, often in collaboration with peers, and they can get help from their instructor and from peers as their questions arise.

Therefore, students are expected to gain first exposure to concepts through readings or by watching videos before class, and they are held accountable for that pre-class work to ensure they prepare.

From: The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), University of Michigan.

**Teaching Like Jesus by Donald W. Patterson**

Check out the appendix to learn about and reflect the teaching style of Jesus!

Lesson 5 will provide additional training to effectively bring the class to a close. Send participants home with the right message.

Activity: Plan Key Parts of the Lesson

It's your turn to Plan Key Parts of the Lesson

Step One: Plan three learning objectives with the following information:



This is what you see: You have identified this.	This is your goal: You work toward this.	This is what you study: You'll look for this next.	These are your learning objectives:
Confusion or uncertainty about the differences between Christian or Lutheran churches.	Ability to explain basic doctrines and find the supporting passages in Scripture.	Material written to distinguish doctrinal differences.	

Step Two: Select one of your learning objectives from Step One (above) and describe the best way for a step by step learner to grasp the information.

Step Three: Use this same example to create a leading question. You want participants to understand how their view of Scripture is different than the world-view. The answer you are seeking is, "We believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God." Write the leading question.

PLAN LOGISTICS AND MAKE FINAL PREPARATIONS

Even the best lesson plans for teaching can be squandered if the logistics of Bible study are not addressed. Stay diligent (or enlist help) to make sure these details are covered. You want the women in Bible study to feel comfortable and secure in their setting rather than uncertain about whether things are organized. Something as simple as the wrong room number can frustrate participants and create a rocky start even though you are well prepared to teach.

Final preparations will smoothly transition participants into a relaxed environment and maximize their learning.

Plan Logistics

- Plan the logistics of the Bible study (this list is also in the appendix)
- Market the Bible study
- Establish communication

Plan the Logistics of the Bible Study

Logistical planning began as you worked through Lesson 3 and identified the target audience. The survey and conversations gave input for the day, time, location and length of the study. Then after reviewing and evaluating resources, you met with your pastor to finalize the Bible study material. Now you have all the basic information you need.

But before you move on to marketing (which is the next important step), you have a few more logistical plans to finalize. These are easily overlooked as you excitedly invite women to Bible study and prepare to teach.

These are just a few questions to help you walk through a logistical plan. (Lesson 5 will include some last minute preparations).

- How many women will you plan for? (How many books will you order, how many copies do you need and how many chairs will be set up?)
- Who makes copies of the handouts?
- Do you want or need women to register? (Where or how?)
- If women invite others how will they share the details?
- Who will unlock the door and turn on the lights? (Then lock-up, etc.)
- Who else will be in the building? (Will the outside door be locked?)
- Does someone need to shovel the sidewalk? (And where is the shovel?)
- Will someone need to adjust the thermostat? (How do you do that?)

- Does someone need to make coffee and then clean the coffee pot? (Where are those supplies? Do you need to bring your own coffee/filters/k-cups?)
- Will there be snacks? (Who does that—and did they plan for dietary needs?) Some women use a “traveling plate” that someone takes home and brings back with treats. Then it goes home with someone else.
- Will there be tables to wipe down? (Just wiped or sanitized?)
- Will there be children who need day care or items to play with? (Who gets those and puts them away?)
- Will you need name tags? (Don’t forget a good marker or pen!)
- How will you get a list of the contact information for women who attend? (You’ll want this for changes due to emergencies or weather.)
- What is the expectation for how tidy the room should be when you’re done? (Avoid frustration by making sure you know the answer to this.)

Thinking through these details will make things go smoothly!

Market the Bible Study

The need for marketing—and the challenges of great marketing cannot be understated. An announcement in the bulletin can easily become just another item in a long list of events and important information.



What is a Marketing?

For the purpose of this study, “marketing” will refer to the publicity provided for your Bible study.

A marketing plan is a purposeful strategy to effectively reach people in a target audience.

You identified and learned about the target audience in Lesson 3. Use what you learned! Reach and appeal to the target audience with good fonts, inviting graphics, appealing photos, and your church logo. Where will you find these women? What are they looking for and how can you get or keep them interested?

You already did research—make the most of what you learned!

Plan a series of timely announcements in a variety of places (church, social media, etc.). List the places you plan to publish the information and dates.

Don't start marketing until all the details are set—you want to avoid confusion and corrections whenever possible. Review Lesson 3 to make sure you have all the details covered.

- Begin four to six weeks prior to the event if possible. Don't repeat the same narrative, offer a fresh invitation each time.
- Remember that information for a monthly newsletter, weekly bulletin, website, or social media will need to be submitted in a timely manner.

You can start with a simple marketing plan like this and then plan each piece. It might look like this for a class that starts on Monday, February 15th.

Sunday Bulletin	Social media	Posters, flyers	Church mailboxes	Newsletter
Jan. 10-Feb. 14	Jan. 10-Feb. 14 (3 x week)	Up Jan. 17	Jan. 24	Feb. 1

Personally invite women—especially those you noted when you listed your target audience. Reach out to ask women if they have heard about the Bible study or the topic you will be teaching. Better yet, talk about the ministry goals for the Bible study. (Do you see how you are using all the work you did earlier?)

Subtly talk about the Bible study goals in your conversations and invitations:

- “Our Bible study group is looking to connect women and help them spend more time in the Word. Would you like to join us—even if it is just for a few weeks? There are some people I'd love to introduce you to!”
- “I wanted to invite you to Bible study—with everything going on in the world many of us are looking for strength and stability. Would you like to join us to see God's perspective and spend some time in prayer?”
- “You might be interested in our new Bible study topic. We're going to look at what God says about authority. The world isn't offering a very clear picture of God's design so we want to see what Scripture says.”
- “We have a Tuesday night Bible study that really digs into God's Word and asks some tough questions. I've appreciated your interest in Scripture and insightful comments, and I was really hoping you could join us.”

Better marketing needs more work and greater commitment. Your message needs more than logistical details. Why will women give up their time to attend and how will it help them? This is not always a selfish question! Women have to make choices about their commitments and priorities. They want to know that this Bible study will be a good fit for them.

Praise God that some women will just attend because it is Bible study. But others need encouragement, an invitation, or a reason why they should come. This is why you did all that work listening to needs, finding an audience, and setting goals—so you could reach women in need and point them to Christ in the Word.

After Bible class has started, you can put updates in the bulletin or newsletter that highlight some of the key points you covered. You can continue to create interest and help women remember the importance of what is studied.

Establish Communication

How will people know if there is Bible study or where can they check the date, time, and location? Will it be on the church calendar or in the bulletin? What if there is a mistake in the announcement? Keep track of all the places you share the information and ask women what is most helpful for them.

How will people know if there is a weather cancellation? Do you have a list of all the participants to contact if there is an emergency change of plans?

There are many options. Just be sure your group knows where to look.

Check your phone or messages for last minute notifications from participants. While you must respect the privacy of participants, some women may mention the reason for their absence and ask for prayer (e.g. a sick child). Sharing this information may help build a loving sense of community but should only be done if you have permission.

Some groups may benefit from a reminder text, e-mail, or social media post the night before or the morning of Bible study. Find what is best and most helpful to your group.

Make Final Preparations

The day of Bible study, take a moment to think through these final preparations.

- Have materials accessible
- Prepare the room
- Greet all the women
- Start on time and plan for adjustments

Have Materials Accessible



Hand-Outs and Material

If you hand out materials to the women be sure to use them. For example, if you hand out maps or a time line, remember to reference it or include an explanation in the lesson plan. Don't just hand them out.

- Have Bibles available if someone forgets their Bible.
- Have extra study sheets if new people show up.
- Have copies of the study from the previous lesson in case someone missed the last Bible study and wants a copy of the lesson.
- Have copies of maps or other reference materials ready to distribute

Prepare the Room

Don't overlook the importance of the space you meet in. You may not be able to change or adapt your meeting room, but if you can, arrange the room so women can see each other. If possible, have tables or a place for them to open books and take notes.

If the seating arrangement is less than desirable, make a special effort to encourage visiting and interactions before and after class.

If the room is large, remember that it may be difficult for some to hear or understand when others speak. Repeat the comments or questions to make sure everyone hears what was said.

Make sure lighting is adequate.

Make every effort to work through these accommodations prior to class.

Greet All the Women

Create a warm and inviting environment by greeting women and addressing them by name. If there are new participants, introduce them to others and ask them to introduce themselves to the group when you begin. You may want to consider nametags if most of the group is new. It is often helpful if people share a little about their background when they introduce themselves.



The Word of God and People

It has been said, "There are only two things that will last forever: people and God's Word. Set your priorities accordingly."

Study God's Word to prepare for Bible study, but when you arrive remember that each person is a soul Jesus loves. Don't lose sight of each individual person.

Note those who are missing and follow up with them by sending a quick text or e-mail to let them know they were missed. In Lesson 2 you asked your pastor if he needed attendance for his records. Where will you note that? This is a perfect task to delegate. Share these types of duties to heighten ownership of the study.

Pay attention to the conversations that happen before Bible study so you know what is on the mind of others. Listen carefully to the personal and family situations—who is having grandbaby, surgery, or a medical test? Keep these women in your prayers and build a community that is caring and supportive.



Consistency is Important

Continue to meet even if attendance slows or drops for a while. It helps to have a consistent schedule so women can plan ahead (e.g., every Tuesday, or first and third Monday). Continuity will help women feel confident in attending and inviting others.

Having class every other week might create confusion if someone misses a class or two and can't remember which week Bible study is held. Just be mindful that people need reminders. Make the schedule easily accessible.

Start on Time

Do you need a signal to begin? If women are chattering, how will you let them know it is time to start? You might have a timer on your phone or you could stand up and move to the place where you will teach. Be creative.

Start on time. Many women make sacrifices to attend Bible study. Some will get a baby sitter, grab drive-thru food after a long day, or literally rush out the door after dinner. Show them respect by starting on time—those 10 minutes could have been very important to someone.

If women want to spend time extra talking, set a fellowship time before class. Announce that 6:45-7:00 is fellowship time and Bible study begins at 7:00. That allows women to make their own decisions about time and priorities.



Activity: Plan Logistics and Make Final Preparations

It's your turn to Plan Logistics and Make Final Preparations

Step One: List three things you will need address in the logistical planning for the Bible study you will teach.

Step Two: If your church has a secretary, write down her name, e-mail and phone number. She will likely manage the bulletin and newsletter announcements, make copies of the lessons, and possibly post social media. Make a note to regularly express your appreciation for her work.

Step Three: What will you do to start the class if all the women are chatting? Explain what method you are most comfortable with.

Your Turn to Prepare To Teach Bible Study

It's your turn to Prepare To Teach Bible Study.

Review and Exercises

Review the following exercises from this lesson. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section.

Learn How to Study the Text Diligently

- Write a prayer to use when you begin your personal Bible study time.

Plan Key Parts of the Lesson

- Plan three learning objectives with the following information:

This is what you see: You have identified this.	This is your goal: You work toward this.	This is what you study: You'll look for this next.	These are your learning objectives:
Confusion or uncertainty about the differences between Christian or Lutheran churches.	Ability to explain basic doctrines and find the supporting passages in Scripture.	Material written to distinguish doctrinal differences.	

Plan Logistics and Make Final Preparations

- What will you do to start the class if all the women are chatting? Explain what method you are most comfortable with.

Lesson 5: Teach Faithfully, Wisely and Well



Teach Faithfully, Wisely and Well

Teach Faithfully

Wisely Maximize Dynamics

Teach With Skill

Introduction



Helps As You Start Teaching

- It may help if you can team-teach with someone for a lesson or two—that will really help if you are nervous.
- Find a mentor who is already teaching that can encourage you and walk through the process with you. She can help you with questions, lesson plans, or teaching styles.
- The Lord is faithful and his Word always works. Study hard and pray often, but trust the Holy Spirit to do his work. Be confident in the truth and power of Scripture.
- The Lord will give you words to say. It's not a cliché.

Let's walk you through what will happen, step-by-step as you teach class.

TEACH FAITHFULLY

To God be the glory—he has prepared you to teach!

Open With Prayer

Before Bible study, spend time privately praying that God would bless your teaching. Ask him to keep you faithful as you teach God's Word. Keep praying while you teach, especially when difficult questions or comments arise.

When the Bible study begins, open with prayer. This is another place to engage other women. Do not ask someone to lead a prayer unless you have talked to them in advance. Tell women that you have asked someone to open with prayer so they don't worry about being called on to pray in front of others.

You may want to incorporate these Bible passages in your prayers:

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (2 Corinthians 4:5)

*May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

Here is an example of an opening prayer:

Lord Jesus, it is a privilege and pleasure to gather together as sisters in Christ to study your Word. Bless our time together and strengthen our faith with your Word. Deepen our understanding of your truths and grant us wisdom as we learn to apply all that we have studied. When we see the truth of the law in your Word, pierce our hearts to see our sin, and then quickly comfort us with the blessing of your gospel. When we feel discouraged because we cannot keep all your commands, remind us that Christ has indeed lived a perfect life on our behalf. Help us focus on your amazing gifts of grace, forgiveness, and righteousness. May our time together leave us with joyful hearts, renewed faith, confidence in the gospel, and motivation to live for your glory. In the name of Jesus our Savior we pray. Amen.

See appendix for additional opening prayers.

Teach What You Have Prepared

You have spent a considerable amount of time preparing to teach. The time you spent studying, praying, and talking with your pastor all prepared you to teach this class. Trust the power and influence of the Word—be confident that the Spirit will do his work. You have done the work, now it is time to simply present the material and teach the truth.



Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

The learning objectives were planned as you prepared the lesson. Don't be distracted from what you have prepared to teach (unless you are experienced and know what you're getting into!).

Have participants read Scripture verses out loud and keep your Bibles open. Bible study should be a study of Scripture and the gospel should influence the conversations. The message of salvation will shed light on the Word and you should search Scripture to answer questions whenever possible.

Watch Your Teaching Closely

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:16)

A life of learning will keep you humble and dependent on Scripture. You teach Scripture—not your own thoughts. Recognize and respect the importance of handling Scripture correctly.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)



What is False Doctrine and How Do You Avoid It?

Any teaching that contradicts, undermines, adds to, or takes away from God's Word is false doctrine (the word doctrine means "teaching").

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:5)

The best way to recognize false doctrine is to study Scripture and know what is true. Learn God's Word so well that when something is untrue it doesn't sound right and draws your attention.

False doctrine appears in many ways and can be difficult to detect. Your pastor can help you see what to watch for.

The words of Paul to Titus are especially helpful.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:9)

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. ² Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. ³ Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. ⁴ Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:1-5)

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. (Titus 3:4-8)

The words of 1 and 2 Timothy also give direction to those who teach the Word.

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. ⁶ If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰ That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe. ¹¹ Command and teach these things. (1 Timothy 4:1-11)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

Jesus spoke with perfect authority because he was the Word made flesh. As true God, his words and teaching were always perfect.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matthew 7:28,29)

The best way for you to follow the example of Christ is to teach Scripture and answer questions with Scripture. Your thoughts and opinions are not trustworthy nor do they carry Scripture's inerrant, inspired authority.

Reach out to your pastor with difficult questions or topics that come up. Women should know that the pastor continues to give you guidance—you should share his insights and the answers he offers. Remember that your teaching should build respect and appreciation for your pastor.



Activity: Teach Faithfully

It's your turn to Teach Faithfully

Step One: Write a prayer, hymn verse, or Scripture passage appropriate for opening Bible study with the group.

Step Two: If someone asked a question about addiction, how could you respond? (Don't forget about the Bible study resources you learned about in Lesson 1.)

Step Three: What epistles in the New Testament will be especially helpful for you as a teacher? (You are still applying what you learned in Lesson 2.) Make a reading plan so you return to their truths regularly.

MAXIMIZE DYNAMICS WISELY

When women teach women there is a special connection. Watch the bond of Christ's love and fellowship bring them delight as they are learning. The interaction is very personal and encouraging. Encourage women to share—facilitate more than teach.

Any special learning needs should have been noted when you were selecting your audience, but once the class has begun, note how various participants are engaging. If someone regularly checks the table of contents in their Bible to find a book, you may want to say, "Let's look at Philippians 2:1" then add, "Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians." Help women stay engaged.



Learn Teaching Skills From Your Pastor's Example

You can also learn teaching skills at your pastor's Bible studies. Listen to how he asks or answers questions and note any resources that he mentions—learn from his example as a theologian and teacher.

Create Unity and Build Fellowship

Create unity and respect diversity. Make sure everyone is engaged, has a chance to talk, and feels included. Pay special attention to new participants or those who might struggle to fit in and look for ways to create cross-cultural or cross-generational bonds. Remember that women are very relational. They appreciate moments to encourage one another and build one another up.

Bible study participants will have insights and experiences to share. The personal interaction is a great blessing and builds up the body of Christ. Encourage their active participation and eagerness to ingest the Word of God. Women are often eager to make applications from God's Word and understand how their lives can reflect God's holiness.

Remember the joy of the Bereans, *"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true"* (Acts 17:11).

It is also important for you to have a servant's heart and a spirit of servant leadership. Servant leadership puts Jesus at the center and works to connect others to him—it also connects believers to their pastor and congregation. It isn't about connecting them to you.

Troubleshoot People Pitfalls

Inevitably, you will have situations that need a some loving redirection. Personalities and sinful natures can create conflict or raise tension. Don't be surprised to see Satan hard at work trying to divide God's people and edge others out.

Listen carefully for comments that are aggressive, accusatory, or divisive. Point women back to the attitude of humility, love, and unity. Help women soften any sharp opinionated edges. Encourage them to talk to their pastor if they are truly upset about something. You can't solve all the world's problems—you are there to point them to Jesus.

Engage other participants in the discussion with open, encouraging questions:

- “Are there any other comments?”
- “Any final questions before we move on?”
- “What else do we need to keep in mind?”

If you still struggle to manage Bible study discussions, don't be afraid to ask your pastor or an experienced teacher for insights or help.

Know What Adult Learners Need

Adult learners have similar learning patterns—consider how you can adapt your teaching style for the benefit of others. Experts have found that adult learners need to understand why they are learning something. They aren't interested in extra information—it is more important for them to know how it benefits them. Keep that concept in mind and let it shape your teaching, because nothing benefits them more than learning God's Word—and you want to remind them of that truth.

Adult learners also appreciate learning when it allows them to solve a problem or address a struggle they face. Since everyone suffers under the curse of sin, God's Word is a ready and powerful solution. Help the participants connect the dots from the hardships and sin in this world to God's redeeming love story in Christ. Show them how personal Christ's love really is—help them meet God in the Word.



Adult Learners are Unique

Educational specialists have identified and theorized similar principles for adult learners. Most adult learners value the process of learning as much as the content. Strategies such as simulations, self-evaluation, and role playing are powerful tools. The role of teachers should reflect a facilitator or resource more than one who lectures. These principles are also commonly accepted:

1. Adults need to know why they need to learn something.
2. Adults need to learn experientially (or relate the learning to their experiences).
3. Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value.
4. Adults approach learning as problem-solving.



Activity: Maximize Dynamics Wisely

It's your turn to Manage Dynamics Wisely

Step One: Plan an ice-breaker activity for your first Bible study that will help women build relationships with each other.

Step Two: What emotion describes how you might feel in a difficult discussion at Bible study: frustrated, defensive, threatened, intimidated, or afraid? How will you handle that emotion?

Step Three: Write down three reasons that women need to know God's Word better.

TEACH WITH SKILL

Plans and Objectives

Don't second guess your plans, objectives, and preparations at the last minute. Trust the preparation and processes you have worked through. Follow what you have planned for your lesson and teach to your objectives. You may wonder if you have done enough preparation or if you will really reach women—but those are the wrong questions. Remember it is not about you. They will meet God in the Word.

Tangents often come up in class. One question leads to another and soon the topic is completely unrelated. If you are new to teaching, simply thank the women for the great discussion and lead them back to the lesson. Or you might let them know they have two more minutes for the discussion and ask if they would like to have a Bible study on the topic at another time.

A more experienced teacher may know how and when to use the opportunity for a beneficial discussion. Wisdom and experience will guide the decision of whether the teaching objectives can wait. You will need to determine the value of the discussion in a very short amount of time.

Manage the time you have well. Keep the group moving forward through the material but balance that stride with a sensitivity to the needs of the group. Earlier you gave consideration to the importance of completing a lesson in the allotted time. Remember that decision prior to Bible study so you know how flexible you can be.

Managing Questions In the Classroom

Questions are a very important part of your teaching, and they should not be used randomly. Have your key questions planned and written out. Your word choices can make a huge difference in how participants will answer.

Give the participants time to think of their answer and figure out how they want to say it—do not rush them or start speaking. They will quickly learn to stay quiet if you always step in with the answer or additional comments. Wait 10-15 seconds (which will seem like an eternity).

Watch the faces of participants to see if someone has a thought they might share—but be careful not to embarrass anyone. If you know that someone doesn't mind being called on, you could ask, "Mattie, did that spark a thought?"

Questions that are answered with a simple “yes” or “no” limit discussion and should be rephrased if possible. If the answer needs to be yes or no, consider adding:

- “(yes or no)...and why would that be important?”
- “(yes or no)...and please explain your answer.”
- “(yes or no)...and can you provide an example or reference in Scripture that supports your answer?”

Redirect wrong answers and be cautious not to embarrass the person who answered (sometimes it could be your fault because you asked a bad question!). If part of the answer is correct, pick up that thought and ask for other ideas, “Yes, he was from the tribe of Judah. Do we know anything else about where he came from?”

If a participant asks you a question that is unclear, ask them to explain it further or give an example. Allow them time to explain what they mean. If you are still unsure, restate the question to them so you are clear about what they are asking.

Defer questions when necessary. No one knows all the answers, and it provides an opportunity for your group to recognize the leadership and spiritual guidance of your pastor. When you get his answer, don’t forget to share it with the women next time you meet. Sometimes, the pastor is down the hall and available to step in for quick answer!

You will learn much more as a teacher and gain insights as participants ask questions and respond with comments you would have never imagined! Listen carefully and well—not just to answer the question but to appreciate the faith of others and understand where they are coming from. Unique questions need unique answers. Don’t push the question into the same old box—marvel at the insights and thinking of your sisters in Christ.

Finish Strong

Ask participants about their key takeaways. What will they remember from their time in God's Word? This will help you see how clearly you taught the lesson and whether you met the objectives—but this is not the time to reteach the lesson! (You may write a note that your review time next week might be longer!).

Some closing discussions could end on a somber or heavy topic, and the participants might need a fresh breath of gospel before they leave. Take the time to remind them of the big picture and God's redeeming love story!

Include these elements in your closing moments:

- Review homework or optional reading. Do they need any materials to prepare for the next lesson?
- End on time.
- Mark the ending point.
- Thank them for attending.
- Close the class with prayer. Many times women will have special prayer requests. You may want to keep a list of those requests.

After class, find time to write down a few notes from Bible study.

- What concerns did the women express or want to pray about?
- What went well during the class and what could have been done better?
- Did any topics come up that might be a good Bible study in the future?
- Were there any women that were missing—do they need to be contacted?
- Spend time privately praying for the women.



Activity: Teach With Skill

It's your turn to Teach With Skill

Step One: Write down one or two statements that will help you redirect participants back to the study if they have gone too far on a tangent.

Step Two: Write down two things that make a question less effective.

Step Three: Where are you going to keep your notes from the Bible class? Will you have a separate journal or binder? How will you organize all the information—and what information are you keeping?

Your Turn to Teach Faithfully, Wisely and Well

It's your turn to Teach Faithfully, Wisely and Well

Review and Exercises

Review the following exercises from this lesson. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section.

Teach Faithfully

- What epistles in the New Testament will be especially helpful for you as a teacher? Make a reading plan so you return to their truths regularly.

Wisely Maximize Group Dynamics

- Write down three reasons that women need to know God's Word better.

Teach With Skill

- Write down two things that make questions less effective.

Lesson 6: Teach the Word at Home



Enrich Your Home With Scripture

Learn God's Priorities for Your Home

Work in Partnership

Create a Christian Home

Introduction

Women have a wide variety of abilities, opportunities, and maturity levels. Some women are in a setting where they can teach Scripture, others are not. Not everyone has the gifts to teach Bible study or Sunday School. But teaching in the home is different. When there are children in the home it isn't an option—it is God's command. You can't say "I don't have that gift" or "I don't know enough." As a Christian parent, you are responsible for teaching Scripture to your family.

This entire training equips you to teach the Word of God, and this lesson is especially helpful as you teach Scripture in your home! Spend time in the Word, learn, grow, and then share his truth with others. It is that simple. Scripture is the source of all you teach—and you don't have to know all the answers!

You may feel some hesitation or uncertainty about your abilities but it is the Word of God that makes your teaching in the home effective and powerful.

*“So is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11)*

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Like newborn babies, crave the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow up with the result being salvation.” (1 Peter 2:2)

If you do not have a daily habit of reading Scripture and talking about it in your home, simply start. As you become more familiar with the Word of God, it will be easier for you to talk about it with others.

Every day is a new day, just keep at it to make God’s Word a priority!

It is God’s priority for your home—it is God’s work, and God will help you.

LEARN GOD’S PRIORITIES: WHAT, WHY, AND HOW

There are likely three questions running through your head: What? Why? How?

This training will answer all those questions and more:

1. What is God’s priority? The salvation of souls.
2. Why is it a priority? Because Satan tries to draw believers away from God.
3. How do you make this a priority? Be in the Word.

Prioritize the Gift of Salvation

Parents want their children to be healthy, safe, and have a good education—but Christian parents are invested in God’s eternal priorities. Life on this side of heaven is temporary. Nurture Christ-centered faith in your children because everything will decay except God’s Word and people. Your children are the only thing you can take to heaven. Reinforce God’s priority to spend eternity with your child.



God's Plan of Salvation Is His Greatest Priority

This entire training points to the great love story of Scripture. God's love given through Christ is perfect—the gift of salvation is complete. This is the central message of Scripture and the greatest desire of God.

*Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:22)*

I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked should turn from their ways and live. (Ezekiel 33:11)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3,4)

Beware of Satan's Temptations

Scripture is explicit about the danger, schemes, and desires of Satan. The devil wants to destroy faith and keep your children from receiving eternal life in heaven. Satan deceitfully plants doubt about the Word and magnifies every weakness or uncertainty. But he also strikes in broad day light with vicious, full-on attacks. Satan exploits everything for evil and never speaks the truth.

[Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. (1 Peter 5:8,9)

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can make your stand against the devil's schemes. (Ephesians 6:12)

Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14)

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

Satan's voice is trying to reach your child, and it will never seem as loud as the moment your child leaves home. So train and equip your child with Scripture—and when they leave home you can entrust them to the Lord. The years you have at home with your children are rich with opportunities to teach them God's truth and point to the power of Scripture.

*Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger. (Psalm 8:2)*

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

You want your children in heaven. Equip your children with the Word.

Utilize the Truth and Power of God's Word

The world resounds with Pilate's question, "*What is truth?*" (John 18:38). It doesn't believe absolute truth exists—it scoffs at the idea. But God's Word is truth. As your children learn Scripture and grow in faith, you can be confident in the inerrant, unchanging Word of God. It is perfect.

*The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.*

*The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

⁸ *The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

⁹ *The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.*

*The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous. (Psalm 19:7-9)*

*All your words are true;
all your righteous laws are eternal. (Psalm 119:160)*

Your Word is truth. (John 17:17)

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:31,32)

Enrich your home with Scripture and trust the Word of God to strengthen faith.

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Romans 10:17)

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14)

God's Word is our great heritage
 And shall be ours forever;
 To spread its light from age to age
 Shall be our chief endeavor.
 Through life it guides our way,
 In death it is our stay.
 Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
 We keep its teachings pure
 Throughout all generations. (public domain)

Encourage your children to trust in Scripture and inwardly digest its truth. As Christians learn Scripture the Holy Spirit renews God's image within them. God's thoughts are planted in the hearts of believers. Transformed with God's thoughts and his unchanging truth, discernment becomes a fruit of faith. Scripture equips believers to distinguish the lies of the world around them. Scripture arms God's people against the lies of Satan—and even the deceitful whisperings of self.

Listen to the voice of God as he speaks through the Word—and train your children to hear it. Thoughtfully and thoroughly discuss what is true. Learn how to carefully critique messages from the world. Teach your children to discern Satan's lies. Teach them to hear the voice of the Shepherd as he loves and leads his sheep through the Word. Learn alongside them.

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. (John 10:3,4)

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9,10)

The Word of God is not only true, it is powerful, eternal, and unfailing.

*As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)*

The power of God's Word strengthens faith and equips your children for hardship. The difficulties will come. Make sure your children are prepared.

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6,7)

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)

The task of teaching your children about grace through Christ, discernment of truth and how to prepare for hardship is overwhelming. Remember this is the work of God, his Word is the source and power. You are the one who gets to share it with your children. But you are not alone. The next section of this lesson will point you to the partnerships given by God to help you.



Activity: Learn God's Priorities for Your Home

It's your turn to **Learn God's Priorities for Your Home**

Step One: List at least three non-verbal ways that you communicate your faith and love for God in your home. (Hint: What do you do or have that demonstrates your faith and the value of God's Word?)

Step Two: Finding time and having good resources to share God's Word are common obstacles that keep people from talking about Scripture at home. Explain how your personal devotion time can help overcome these obstacles.

Step Three: List several common situations in life where you have an opportunity to teach your children discernment. When do they see you make a choice between right and wrong? When do they see you look beyond human barriers to love others? When do you talk about what influences your decisions?

WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

Before you get started on these renewed priorities for your home, it helps to remember you are not alone. You will easily get discouraged or burned out if you try to do all of this yourself. God designed people to work in partnership with others.

When you think about building a Christian home in partnership, a Christian marriage is likely the first relationship that comes to mind. It is indeed a wonderful blessing—and you'll hear more about it in this training. But not everyone has an active, engaged Christian husband. You will learn to value partnerships in the home and church as important blessings that equip and encourage you to keep God's Word a priority.

This training equips women in any situation to keep God's Word a vital part of their home with wisdom, confidence, and support.

A quick note—though this training explains God's design for Christian homes, no one lives up to God's standard. All parents (with or without Christian spouses) may struggle to teach their children Scripture. God's Word gives guidance and encouragement to share Scripture in your home. This is not meant to shame you with guilt or cause frustration because you don't live in an ideal situation. Rather, it is meant to encourage you to prioritize the teaching of Scripture in your home. The final section in this lesson gives concrete ideas of how to do it.

Value God's Design for Christian Families

A Christian marriage is a lighthouse for the Christian family and home. It stands strong with a light that gives guidance, offers security, and provides protection. Like the fortress of God's Word, it is a rich blessing.

Just as the committed love of a marriage spills over into a home, the intentional and humble efforts to prioritize God's Word will cascade rich blessings to your family. Just as spouses invest time and make sacrifices for marriage, the efforts and work you put into family devotions will produce fruit. Just like marriage, you may need guidance from others or appreciate resources to enrich your relationship—the same is true of family devotions.

As a spiritual leader, a Christian husband is responsible for the spiritual growth of his wife and spiritual education of the children. This important role can seem insurmountable, but it is God's design for leadership in the home. The husband's holy calling includes both authority and accountability.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.” (Ephesians 5:25-29)

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

Though God has given this important responsibility to fathers, Christian couples share spiritual goals—especially for their children. A Christian wife contributes, supports, and works toward those goals along with her husband as they seek to build their children’s faith together.

A family mission statement may help a family set clear goals and understand their purpose. It can help you evaluate choices and priorities. It may also identify distractions. It will lead you to answer the question, “What are we doing and why are we doing it?”

Most importantly, attend worship as a family and partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Active participation in your congregational life is also important. Don’t just show up and then leave right away. Be a part of God’s family. Know what is going on at church and enjoy wholesome fellowship with your church family. Build friendships and relationships with other believers. Those conversations and friendships are part of the learning process as you grow in understanding how to talk about your faith.

Thrive Even in the Absence of a Godly Father

God’s intentional design and holy desire is that men provide loving spiritual headship to their families, but it does not always happen.

A Christian home may not have the blessing of a strong Christian father.

- A Christian father may be absent or does not live in the home.
- A Christian father may be reluctant or unable to fulfill his responsibility as a spiritual leader.
- A father might be an unbeliever. He may or may not be supportive in matters of faith.
- A father may not be in the picture.

What can you do?

First, remember you are not alone. A lot of people live in situations like this and raise godly children! Don't ever give up. You may need to make adjustments as you teach your child spiritual truths but the plan is still the same—teach the Word. It may look different in your home, but the Holy Spirit is present in the Word.

Next, recognize it is an intimidating responsibility and a husband may doubt his ability to care for the spiritual health and welfare of his family. There are many reasons he may shy away or not step up. Your support and loving encouragement will be especially important if this is something new for him.

If your husband does not want to have family devotions or doesn't get around to it, you can still have devotions with the children. Be sensitive in this type of situation but don't feel guilty about teaching your children Scripture. Keep praying that your husband will be encouraged by your example and moved to participate more actively. Do it in a way that draws him to be a part of your family's spiritual journey—don't be arrogant or bitter with him.

God may be working in your husband's heart as you teach your children Scripture. Talk to your pastor if you need guidance in navigating how to show respect to your husband if he doesn't want to have family devotions or just doesn't do it. Don't give up—continue to work toward encouraging your husband and children.

“Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.”
(1 Peter 3:1-6)

It is difficult to manage decisions that will show respect to your husband and maintain your commitment to the spiritual training of your children. There are no easy answers, but your loving and merciful Father in heaven watches, comforts, and guides you on the journey. He wants the people you love to be in heaven—even more than you do.

Be patient and do your best. Shine with humility and grace. Pray for wisdom and confidence. *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power”* (Ephesians 6:10). Never forget that God is with you. Meet him daily in the Word.

Engage As Partners With Your Church to Train Your Children

Enjoy congregational life with your family! Be aware and engaged in the ministry work planned to nurture children and families. The partnership of your church is invaluable as you train your children.

Make sure your children know the pastor and understand his important role in their life. Speak well of him to encourage them in a healthy spiritual relationship with your pastor.

Build relationships with the elders, leaders, and spiritually mature men in your congregation. Those relationships are designed by God to bless you and your children. Appreciate the godly leaders and male role models in the family of Christ and your local congregation. The support and counsel of these men are wonderful gifts as you train your children with spiritual truths.

The encouragement and influence of your pastor and other men in the church are an important blessing to your children—especially if their father is not active in this role. God designed the family of Christ to stand together in love and faith. It is a place where believers mentor and influence each other with the Word.

You can also build healthy relationships with Christian women who are mature, wise and compassionate. Find comfort and hope in their advice. Study God's Word with them if you are able. Ask God to provide those women in your life. Other "spiritually single" mothers can walk by your side to mentor you with godly wisdom.

Your church's partnership also brings your children the blessing of relationships with Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, Lutheran elementary school staff, and other members. Pray for God to send those people into the lives of your children and ask him to bless them. Others in your extended family may offer encouragement as well.

I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. (Philippians 1:27,28)

Express your thankfulness for the support and partnership you receive in raising your children for the Lord. Speak well of those who serve and watch what you say about them. Speak highly of the church.

There is one more final and loving encouragement to remember as you seek God's plan of partnerships in raising children.

The church is designed to be a partner that equips and supports parents in the training of their children. God gives the parents responsibility to train children and gives "the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

A previous Home Depot® slogan captures the thought well, "You can do it. We can help." Your pastor and church stand ready to equip and assist you in the spiritual training of your children. But God has given the responsibility to parents.

Sunday school, Christian education and confirmation are all ways that the church supports the training of your children. This training is meant to support and enrich your children's understanding of Scripture, not replace the teaching done at home.

**Clumsiness is not an excuse**

"Clumsiness is not an excuse to ignore your role as the primary spiritual leader in your household. Spiritual education is not something to be outsourced to those whom we think are more eloquent or more learned. In other words, we cannot send our children to church, Sunday school, or any type of Christian education and check the "done" box. While these influences are indeed great blessings and valuable, they cannot replace parental influence." —Pastor Bill Monday (myfamilytable.org)



Maximize the Blessings at Church

Here are a few more ideas to make the most of your blessings at church:

- Ask your children about what they discussed at Sunday school, confirmation or youth group. (It may be easier for them to talk about what they “discussed” rather than what they “learned.”)
- Learn the memory work that is assigned at Sunday school or in confirmation. Learn it as a family if you don’t know the assigned memory passages.
- Review the homework or worksheets assigned to your child and talk about the lessons with your child. Ask them questions about it.
- Allow your children the opportunity to tell a Bible story they learned and explain it to you. This is a great learning tool!
- Show interest in the things that are happening at church.
- Talk to your pastor or look up the Bible readings for the upcoming Sunday to discuss them as a family and build anticipation for worship.
- Learn about and discuss the liturgy at church and talk to children about the church year and festival services.
- Learn about hymns and find arrangements to listen to. If you or your child plays piano or an instrument, learn to play hymns. Learn about the composer or look up the history of the hymn—many stories are fascinating!
- Pray for the people who are serving your children at church (Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, etc.).
- Verbally thank your pastor and teachers for their service.
- Send cards of appreciation and consider a gift card or gift (like a devotion book to encourage them in their faith!). Remember they are a gift and blessing to you. Thank and encourage them.

Accept your parental responsibility with humility—and accept the assistance of the church with grateful appreciation.

But there is also something you can give in thankful response.

You can encourage men to be godly leaders in the church.

Women play a valuable and influential role in building the family of Christ as they encourage and affirm the value of men. Create and enable opportunities for men to be a spiritual influence to others. Some men may be new to faith and uncertain about their influence. Build them up to fulfill their role. Encourage husbands, pastors, leaders, and godly men to be the influence and role model God intended. Help them actively engage in the leadership and responsibilities they have been given.



Encourage Christian Men to Be An Influence

It is important for you to see the value of encouraging Christian men to be an influence. Help them see and respond to the places and relationships where they can be a witness. Treasure the model and example Christian men set for a world that doesn't understand the beauty and blessing of a believing man.

It is not just a man's leadership that influences others—it is the grace of God and love of Christ alive in his heart that make him a radiant witness.

Even more important than the influence and fellowship of others, the church proclaims Christ in the Word and sacraments. The church is the place you are taught, strengthened, and nurtured.



Activity: Work in Partnership

It's your turn to Work in Partnership

Step One: Write down two open-ended questions to create a conversation with your husband about family devotions. (These questions are not condemning, nor do they lead to a specific answer. Write down how to start the conversation.)

Step Two: How could you support to a woman who is without a godly leader in her home? How can you help those who are "spiritually single" at your church or in your neighborhood?

Step Three: What questions could you ask in the car on the ride home after church to reinforce the message(s) at worship or in Sunday school?

CREATE A CHRISTIAN HOME

A Christian home is a place where a believer dwells.

There will be identifiable traits or characteristics in a Christian home, but those are merely the fruits of faith. The home is not Christian because of how believers live. The home is Christian because God's grace and forgiveness are alive in the heart of a person in the home.

Your family's unique interests, gifts, and abilities will be reflected in your home and can include a wide variety of styles, interactions, and conversations. Your home looks different as your family grows and changes, but you will find there are many, many ways to reflect Christ in your home.

Consider how adoptive families incorporate food, customs, and stories from their child's native culture. Words from the child's native language are spoken in tender acknowledgment of their homeland, connecting a child to a home they've never known. In the same way, Christian families will incorporate the messages of Scripture in a variety of ways as a reminder of our heavenly home.

But there are also fruits of faith that are consistent with the gift of grace given by God. Forgiveness and repentance reign in a home with humility and grace. Christian living flows from those who have received his mercy and responded with trust and hope. Devotion time and conversations about the Lord are woven into daily living with an eagerness for God's Word.

Practice Forgiveness and Repentance

The unique hallmarks of forgiveness and repentance adorn a Christian home.

Parents and children make mistakes and fall short of God's commands. Courtesy confessions or dismissive absolutions are easily spoken. "Oh, sorry!" "No problem, don't worry about it!" Such comments are quite appropriate in our society or homes and generally reflect an spirit of kindness.

But many times a Christian home can include more meaningful expressions like "I'm sorry, will you forgive me?" Can you hear the difference when someone says, "I forgive you" rather than "It's okay"? It emphasizes the important model of grace and Christ's forgiveness. It reminds others of the forgiveness given to us so freely by God. It reflects his love.

When parents are wrong, they have a wonderful opportunity to model true confession and repentance. There may be a time for you to ask forgiveness of your spouse in front of your children. Other times you may apologize to your children when you've wronged them. Everyone sins and treats others poorly—let your Christian faith guide how you handle those situations. Respond in a way that draws attention to the truth and grace of God.

These forgiving and kind words are rare in homes today. People will notice that your home is different—they notice the spirit and countenance of your home. Your home is a reflection of what is important to you.

Live in a Way that Reflects Christ

Listen again to Moses describe when and where the Israelites were to teach their children. Hear the daily living that encompasses expressions of faith.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:7-9)

There are many ways to put this verse into practice.

Be visible in your personal devotion time if possible so your children can see your priorities and understand what it looks like. Little eyes are watching all the time, excited to mimic their parents. Let them see your love for the Word. Allow them to see the deep connection that a husband and wife can share as believers. What you do is as important as what you say.

Allow your children to hear the conversations you have with your spouse about Scripture and matters of faith. Model healthy conversations about God's Word.

Pray out loud with your family and listen to the prayers of your spouse and children. You will hear the thoughts of their hearts and understand what is important or concerning to them.

You may have decorations on your walls that reflect your faith or have books on your shelves or coffee table that are a witness to what you believe.

Remind your children that God is present in your hearts and your home throughout your day but don't always expect that children will respond with eagerness. It may seem like your words and actions fall on deaf ears but don't give up. Don't expect that fruits of faith will always flourish. Keep living your faith every day, be mindful of your influence, and trust the power of the Word.

Discuss as a couple what the consistent expectations are for children's behavior during church. Is the goal to keep them quiet? Actively participating (standing, sitting, or folding hands)? Look for opportunities to grow as a Christian parent and attend workshops or read books for ideas of how to deal with children in a way that has reasonable consequences and consistency between parents.

Encourage your children to serve at church and look for ways they can be involved and active. Whether it is a children's choir or church cleaning, there are many ways for children to live their faith. Lead them to see they are an important part of the church family.

Don't forget to consider what type of entertainment your family listens to. It isn't just what you say, you should also think about what kind of music is playing, what is on TV, or what movie is playing. Compare those things to Philippians 4:8 and ask, "Is it pure, lovely, admirable, noble, true, excellent or right?" Those media choices are important and influential. Be conscientious about what you listen to.

Build Family Devotion Time Into Your Day

Now you are motivated. Now you know what kinds of things you want to do and what you want to change, but how do you start and what do you do?



Four Steps to Start

(Then pick additional ideas that are a good fit for your family!)

1. Bibles for everyone. Find one that is a good fit for the age and reading level of your child. (With small children, this may be a picture Bible or Bible storybook.)
2. Ask questions about the Bible stories you read so your children learn to think about what you are reading.
3. Teach them to pray. Prayers recited at mealtimes and bedtime are important, but also include personal prayers of thankfulness.
4. Memorization is a great way to incorporate God's truth into your heart and home. Learn Scripture passages or hymn verses together!

The WELS Northeastern Wisconsin Adult Discipleship Committee shares a wealth of encouragement and resources on their website www.myfamilytable.org.

The home page will link you to "[Envision the Future](#)" where Scripture guides your priorities and points you to what is important in your child's future. "[Embrace Your Influence](#)" is filled with encouragement from Scripture to see the influence you have as a parent and a role model. The page "[Establish Patterns](#)" is a fantastic reminder that your spiritual routines and daily habits like bedtime prayers have an important and long-lasting influence on your children.



Let's Talk About Radical Parenting

www.MyFamilyTable.org/table-talk

Our society has little time for quiet family time. Activities are scheduled every day of the week, a tremendous centrifugal force that could only be countered by a worldwide pandemic. Only the most courageous families say “no” to a coach's schedule or other activities that pull family members away from one another. (“You won't be at the game because you are going to *church*?”) What used to be traditional activity for families, like church on Sundays or gathering at the family dinner table, is now radical.

My family is not immune from these powerful forces. My husband and I went through these same struggles as parents. Chasing a want or a dream for our children, we didn't always make the right choices. We second-guessed many of our decisions. We asked for forgiveness often.

Now, our children are teens and twenty-somethings. I treasure those moments before bedtime, reading Bible stories and praying together. What I wouldn't give for more of those tender moments—more time to share God's Word with them, trusting that the Holy Spirit would do his work in their hearts. My husband and I still pray every day that the Holy Spirit would continue working in our young adult children and never let them go. Our active parenting days may be coming to an end; our prayers continue.

One thing's for sure: We as parents treasure the grace God extends for all of our shortcomings and doubts. As we've grown older, we've come to appreciate grace more and more. We look back on our parenting now and we are so very, very thankful for that grace. We've come to realize that it wasn't all of our routines or our formulas that held our children close to the Lord. It has been God's grace all along, flowing from the root, Christ Jesus. Grace has always been flowing to us and through us, even when we didn't notice it. For that we are so very thankful.

Here are just a few ideas to help you start or continue your family devotion time and develop the spiritual life of your children. Start small and do what works for your family. Continue to work toward a routine of daily Bible reading in your home and add ideas or resources that are a good fit for your family.



Ideas to Add to Your Family Devotion Time

- Find a few moments at the beginning of the day to spend time with Jesus. Look for time during the day and at the end of the day—create as many opportunities as you can!
- Family devotions might be done at a set time in the day, at the supper table, or just before bed. You could read directly from the Bible, Catechism, or a devotion resource.
- Read a Bible story book every night when you put your kids to bed. Use a bookmark to keep track of where you are and just read one story each night. Discuss it as much as you can or ask them a question to think about as they fall asleep.
- Don't be overwhelmed, just keep working towards a routine so that talking about faith, Jesus, and Scripture are a natural part of your home. Make it your own.
- Include a variety of styles as you share the Word. You could read a section from Psalms responsively or sing a hymn.
- You could speak the words of the blessings to your children as a final good-night. The blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 will likely be most familiar to your children:

The LORD bless you

and keep you;

²⁵ *the LORD make his face shine on you*

and be gracious to you;

²⁶ *the LORD turn his face toward you*

and give you peace.

- You may just want to start with conversations about God's Word throughout the day. Ask your children about Daniel in the lion's den or the account of Noah and flood. Make those conversations enjoyable learning opportunities.
- Make the most of devotional materials or helps that are available. *Forward in Christ* provides a wealth of encouraging articles and Scriptural studies!

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- Talk to your children about their baptism—remind them of the forgiveness and grace they received. Show them pictures and teach them about baptism. Tell the story of their baptism and explain what happened. You can even do this at bath time!

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:15)

- Infants and toddlers enjoy songs like “Jesus Loves Me” and “I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb.” Sing spiritual songs to your little ones and speak soothing prayers with them. Tell them stories and use board books to share stories from Scripture. Talk to them about Jesus’ faithful love for them.
- Use rhymes to help children learn and remember Scripture.
- Use Luther’s Catechism to lead discussions about the commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and other important truths. Read the passages and discuss the topic. If you don’t know an answer, ask your pastor!
- Consider talking to sons about men in the Bible or what God says to and about men. Talk to your daughters about women in the Bible and what God says to and about women. Teach them to value and esteem both men and women, show them how men and women work together. Teach them to appreciate God’s unique designs.
- Many parents find themselves shuttling children throughout the day. Enrich that time with Christian music, devotion podcasts, Bible trivia questions or stories.
- Strive for consistency with table and bedtime prayers. Teach children the Lord’s Prayer, Luther’s Morning or Evening Prayers.
- Pray for the spontaneous needs you see with your children. Pray for police officers or EMTs if you see an accident. Pray when you pull over for an ambulance or drive by a school or nursing home.
- Incorporate evangelism and mission awareness into your family lifestyle. Learn about missionaries (wels.net/missions) and keep them in your prayers. Cultivate a love for neighbors and unbelievers next door and around the world.



Key Resources to Help With Family Devotion Time and Discussions

Myfamilytable.org is a fantastic resource!

Younger children will enjoy *The Story Bible* by Concordia Publishing or other Bible story and Bible history books. Check out your church library for ideas or talk to your pastor to begin building your own library.

Meditations – a daily devotion book for individuals and families

Forward in Christ – a monthly magazine with a variety of articles

WELS Family Devotions – a podcast for families

Bible story or Bible history books – teach Old Testament stories

Luther's Catechism – a simple instruction book for families.

Your family will enjoy movies such as:

- [The Chosen](#) (YouTube: several seasons with multiple episodes)
- [The Road to Emmaus](#) (YouTube)
- *Come Follow Me* (available at NPH)
- *My Son, My Savior* (available at NPH)
- *To the Ends of the Earth* (available at NPH)

Branches Band – songs for younger children to learn God's Word

Koine – Christian hymns and contemporary music for reflection



Activity: Create a Christian Home

It's your turn to Create a Christian Home.

Step One: Write a brief mission statement for your family or identify the three things that are most important for your Christian home.

Step Two: Identify the key areas you want to address first as you strengthen your Christian home. Scripture? Spiritual conversations? Speech? Forgiveness? Time management? Conflict resolution? What part of God's Word addresses that topic?

Step Three: Find "The Chosen" on YouTube so you can watch the first episode.

Your Turn to Teach the Word at Home

It's your turn to Teach the Word at Home.

Review and Exercises

Items flagged with arrows require action on your part. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section in this lesson.

Learn God's Priorities for Your Home

- List at least three non-verbal ways that you communicate your faith and love for God in your home.

Work in Partnership

- How could you support to a woman who is without a godly leader in her home? How can you help those who are "spiritually single" at your church or in your neighborhood?

Create a Christian Home

- Find "The Chosen" on YouTube so you can watch the first episode.

Lesson 7: Teach Sunday School



Lead Children To God’s Truth

Create a Welcoming Environment

Teach to the Audience

Close the Sunday School Session

Introduction

The surprising joy of teaching Sunday school is that your own faith will grow by leaps and bounds. You are blessed as you study God’s Word, enriched as you share it with children, and privileged to see genuine, child-like faith each week. The relationships you build will last a lifetime. Though children grow, they will always remember you and think of you as “their” Sunday school teacher. They will see you as someone who is invested in their lives. It is an honorable and high calling.

But the calling to teach children is a little different. Jesus gives an extra burden to those who teach children, *“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6).*

There is responsibility here to get it right.

Don't be afraid of this responsibility, but be diligent in your studies and faithful to the Word of God. Don't take the task lightly. Children have open hearts and will believe what you teach them. The earlier lessons in this module are essential in knowing how to study Scripture. You cannot add your own thoughts or ideas.

Before you agree to teach Sunday school you should assess whether you have the time to study and prepare for class. Consider whether you have a love for children and a passion to teach. Assess the need—have you been asked to teach preschool students or eighth graders? Is the need a good fit for your abilities? Are you familiar with the joys, challenges, and communication style for those age students? Accept the position with joy and confidence that God will work through you. It is a great honor and high calling.



Responsibilities of Your Pastor and Sunday School Superintendent

Your pastor and Sunday school superintendent will work together to lead the Sunday school program. They will consider the needs of the students, select the curriculum for the year, and set the schedule.

The schedule will likely include the dates that Sunday school will be held (start, end, and holiday schedule) as well as Christmas service plans and the Sundays selected for singing (optional).

There may also be a structured schedule to follow each week that could include an opening or closing devotion, and possibly time for music. This will help you manage your time in the classroom.

If there are enough teachers, it is very beneficial to have alternating schedules where teachers teach one week and are able to attend adult Bible study on the alternate weeks.

This training will help you understand the unique needs of various age brackets. The charts in this lesson help you see the goals for students at each level. Understand the needs of your class so you can recognize their abilities and struggles—adjust your teaching accordingly. Each age level is very different.



Teaching Resources

Become familiar with the Sunday school curriculum resources!

The curriculum material is filled with ideas for every level. There are songs, ideas, Bible passages, and well-written questions. (Those are important!) Become familiar with the resources available to you!

Many activities in the curriculum are timeless.

One important goal is to proactively help parents stay involved in the spiritual growth of their children at home. Many parents struggle to provide spiritual training and send their children to Sunday school with the intention of delegating that responsibility to you as a Sunday school teacher. With a loving spirit, you can help the parents see how Sunday school can be a spring board for family discussions and devotions. Encourage parents to read the lessons again with their children and review memory work together at the dinner table. Remind them often how easy it will be to use the materials and resources from Sunday school in their own homes. Tell the children to ask their parents to review the lessons and help them with their memory work. Encourage the children to find a place to hang up their Sunday school lesson sheet or project to continue conversations at home.

CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Imagine the joy in a child's heart when they walk into their Sunday School classroom and see their teacher with a warm smile, happy heart, and a personal welcome! It is a wonderful moment to cultivate—don't rob them of it because you need to be in the office making copies of the lesson at the last minute.

It is really important to be prepared for Sunday school before you walk into the classroom—it is for any sort of teaching. But Sunday school teachers should plan to be prepared and ready at least 15 minutes prior to starting the lesson. You need to have the Sunday school classroom ready, copies of the lessons, and all the materials you need so you don't have to leave the classroom. Once the children start coming in they shouldn't be left alone—that's part of a safe environment.

If the room is being used for something prior to Sunday school, you may want to plan a few extra minutes in case you have to pick up the room, straighten chairs, or remove other distractions. Don't forget to grant the same courtesy to whomever uses the room after you—make sure things are picked up.



Have Cell Phone Numbers for Every Parent

Have every parent's telephone number (husband and wife) with you or in the room. If someone suddenly says "I feel really sick," you can send a text to that mom or dad to come get their child. There may be something else that happens where you need to reach parents immediately.

Keep those numbers handy or enter them in your phone!

Be Prepared for Class: Preschool-Kindergarten

Children will start arriving 10 minutes before Sunday school starts so make sure you have everything in the classroom. Preschool children cannot be left alone. You have a very small window before class so you need to really be on your game and ready to go!

Children at this age interrupt with excitement. When you start talking about Jesus on the donkey, you will likely have an exuberant student that has actually seen a donkey (and another student who has been to the zoo...)! Be sure you understand age-appropriate behavior and social skills for your students.

Hopefully you are using something as a tool to teach the story like Popsicle sticks with character cut-outs, a felt board (which can be labor intensive!), or another visual aid. Some ideas will be offered in the curriculum, like building a wall with blocks when they learn about Jericho.



The Use of Manipulatives

Manipulatives are physical objects that are used as teaching tools to engage students in hands-on learning. They can be used to introduce, practice, or remediate a concept. Manipulatives and teaching aids help reach students with visual and tactile learning styles.

Be prepared to tell the story with a visual aid or manipulative and have it ready to go. You may prepare a place for the younger children to hear the story. And hopefully, if you have room in in the area that you're teaching, you'll set up a different area for a craft. It would be ideal if you could have the areas separated somehow so the children can come right to the place where they will learn the story. Then they can go to a different area for the craft. If you do have a separate area for the craft or activity you will also be able to set it up in advance so it is ready to go. Not every room will be suitable for a set up like this—work with what you have but think about how to use your room space wisely.

Be Prepared for Class: Grades 1-2

First and second graders are probably not ready to read directly from the Bible, so you will likely use a summary lesson or worksheet. Have the copies of the lesson ready. You may have a Scripture or hymn verse that you want to put on a board.

If you are acting out the lesson in some way, you want to have those props ready to go after you teach the lesson.

Make sure your craft or activity project is also ready to go.

Be Prepared for Class: Grades 3-4

Third and fourth graders will likely read right from the Bible, so you want to have Bibles out and ready for the students.

If the class is working on a hymn verse, you would want that on the board. That is a great way to start the class.

Be Prepared for Class: Grades 5-8

To create a warm environment with older students, ask each student to share one good thing and one bad thing from their week. The student's responses will give a good indication of what is going on in their life. It helps you stay in touch with their age level and gives you insights about how to apply the lesson to their personal lives. You may have an opportunity to pray with them at the end of class if there are personal concerns.



Activity: Create a Welcoming Environment

It's your turn to Create a Welcoming Environment.

Step One: Where will you look to find visual aids or manipulatives to assist you in teaching little ones? Does the church have things you can use or will you need to find those on your own?

Step Two: When will it be most convenient for you to make the copies you need for Sunday school? Will you be able to get into the building? Do you know how to use the copier?

Step Three: Find three Psalm verses that would offer encouragement or comfort to older students who are struggling with anxiety or loneliness.

TEACH TO THE AUDIENCE

Sunday school curriculums are written to fit specific ages and help you plan the lesson in a way that reaches your audience.

Teach Students in Preschool

At the preschool (non-reading) level you are telling the story, they are not reading it. It's very important to keep things clear and simple, but be prepared for interruptions. While you are telling the story you want the kids are engaged so they may interrupt because they are excited about something. Go with it. Don't worry at this age if they're interrupting unless it is excessive. Otherwise, just go with it and answer the questions—be prepared for that.

After you tell the story, allow the children to participate in retelling the story. Your goal is to have the students repeat the very basic parts of the lesson. After craft time or singing, ask the students to tell the story again. "This is what happened...can anybody help me tell the rest of this story?" They retell it. Then they are really getting into it. You tell it first and then they help you retell it.

Age	The Children	Teacher's Needs	Key Expectations	Goals
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unable to sit for long periods of time -Often interrupt -Very likely this lesson is new to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be patient - Come up with multiple activities to keep children interested - Able to explain things in simplest terms - Be excited about the Word! - Be excited to see the children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sing a song or start class with a rhyme - Teach personal space: we don't touch others; We all stay in our spots - Need to walk quietly from one place to another - When singing in front of church, fold hands or put at your side - When singing in church don't touch your neighbor or wave to someone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God is awesome! - God loves me! - Jesus died for my sins - Children can repeat very basics of lesson to parents

Teach Students in Kindergarten-Grade 2

At the kindergarten to second grade level, you will have pre-readers and emerging readers. Most Sunday school curriculums will have a summary lesson for this age group.

The story summaries are an important part of teaching the lesson, and you want to have copies of that for all the students. Go through the lesson, and if the students are able to read, have them participate by reading paragraphs. If the students do all the reading it will take much longer to get through the lesson. You may want to read alternate paragraphs with your students to get through the lesson more quickly. Just make sure they are participating to the best of their ability.

Keep things simple (not quite as simple as preschool) with age-appropriate words, props, and activities. The students in this age bracket are more familiar with learning, but it will still need to be simple.

Most importantly, be alert to any words that might seem big. You wouldn't use a word like "covenant," but if there is a new word, you need to introduce make sure you are ready to explain it to the children. The summary lesson won't include too many big words, but you should watch for them while you are preparing the lesson.

Age	The Children	Teacher's Needs	Key Expectations	Goals
K-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Some not able to sit for entire hour -Differing levels of reading ability -Lessons still very new to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Keep things simple -Lessons are a summary -Don't use words that will complicate the lesson -Be patient with beginning readers -Look ahead and don't give struggling readers long paragraphs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sing a hymn verse to start the lesson. This cues the children that class is starting. - Tell children how long you expect them to sit—read the story and then we'll get up and move around - When singing in church make sure everyone can hear your words - Pair older children with younger for singing to help follow the music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am a sinner. I don't always do the right thing - God is almighty. He can do anything - Jesus died for my sins. He is my Savior - Jesus provides for all my needs - Children repeat lesson for parents - Memory work from the lesson to do at home

Teach Students in Grades 3-4

You can assume that most children in third grade can read right out of the Bible. The reading level should be suitable in most situations but sometimes this will be the first time children are actually reading directly from a Bible. Make sure the students know where you're at and can follow along. Your personal preparation time will alert you to new or difficult words. You may need to stop a few times while you are reading to explain and introduce things. This is a great age to introduce maps. Show students a map of Israel—point out the borders and show them where the story is taking place. Help them become familiar with key areas and important land marks.

Age	The Children	Teacher's Needs	Key Expectations	Goals
Grade 3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most children are good readers - Family is still the primary place for information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain concepts, that are new to children - Names and places may be new so be willing to explain - Children like hands on and action, draw concepts on a board - Write definitions on the board - Maps are useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give class a tangible cue to start class or sing a hymn - Read the lesson from the Bible - When child not behaving, stand next to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the foundational blocks, plus applications to life - Applications around playground, bus, siblings, parent expectations - Parental inclusion carries a lot of weight - Encourage parents to work on memory work and review lesson at home

Teach Students in Grades 5-8

By the time you get to fifth grade, the children will start to be comfortable and somewhat familiar with the Bible. You will be able to develop more of the Bible lesson and teach them how it applies it to their lives. Connect them to Scripture. Everything in the Bible is written for a reason—teach them to ask, “What is God teaching me and why does he want me to know this?” Students can reflect, “What difference does this truth make in my life?”

The Sunday school curriculum usually includes deeper discussion material for students in this age bracket. There are many teacher’s notes and tools for the leaders. There will be good discussion questions, examples, and applications for you to use. You may also want to study the text in a commentary such as the *Bible History Commentary* by Werner Franzmann (there are three volumes) or the *People’s Bible*. Talk to your Sunday school superintendent about accessing those resources.

Age	The Children	Teacher’s Needs	Key Expectations	Goals
Grades 5-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Looks/bodies are changing - Identity may be at odds with what they learn at church and the way they are treated at school and among peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Important to remind children of their identity in Christ as a saved child of God - Bring out the common blessings all Christians have but also that God created each of us uniquely with different gifts and abilities - Be an encourager who can build up the children - Willing to use additional commentary to add points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge early on that the lesson may be one that is well known, but we are going to take it deeper and figure out how it applies to our lives - Acknowledge that we aren’t all great singers but singing praise to God is something all Christians do - Do not allow put-downs. Remind children that in God’s house we build each other up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All of the above, but applications will be about peers, phones, parents, teachers, sports - Should be able to identify with people in the lesson - May not be forthcoming with parents about lessons (7-8 especially) so the goal is to touch the child’s heart and have them think back to the lesson throughout the week - Able to memorize on their own, especially with parent’s encouragement

It is very important to note which students might struggle with reading or paying attention. There are many physical conditions such as ADHD or Fetal Alcohol Syndrome that reduce a child's ability to focus, concentrate, or sit still. Hopefully the parents have already talked to you. Take time to understand how to accommodate them. Talk to your Sunday school superintendent or find out what you can do (or not do) to help. The child may find something like a stress ball beneficial or you may let them walk around the table a few times and then return to their seat.

At this level there aren't crafts or additional activities. Spend all your time studying the lesson.

Here is the complete chart for Sunday School teachers:

Age	The Children	Teacher's Needs	Key Expectations	Goals
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unable to sit for long periods of time -Often interrupt -Very likely this lesson is new to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be patient - Come up with multiple activities to keep children interested - Able to explain things in simplest terms - Be excited about the Word! - Be excited to see the children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sing a song or start class with a rhyme - Teach personal space: we don't touch others; We all stay in our spots - Need to walk quietly from one place to another - When singing in front of church, fold hands or put at your side - When singing in church don't touch your neighbor or wave to someone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - God is awesome! - God loves me! - Jesus died for my sins - Children can repeat very basics of lesson to parents
K-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Some not able to sit for entire hour -Differing levels of reading ability -Lessons still very new to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Keep things simple -Lessons are a summary -Don't use words that will complicate the lesson -Be patient with beginning readers -Look ahead and don't give struggling readers long paragraphs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sing a hymn verse to start the lesson. This cues the children that class is starting - Tell children how long you expect them to sit – read the story and then we'll get up and move around - When singing in church make sure everyone can hear your words - Pair older children with younger for singing to help follow the music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am a sinner. I don't always do the right thing - God is almighty. He can do anything - Jesus died for my sins. He is my Savior - Jesus provides for all my needs - Children repeat lesson for parents - Memory work from the lesson to do at home

Age	The Children	Teacher's Needs	Key Expectations	Goals
Grades 3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most children are good readers - Family is still the primary place for information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explain concepts, that are new to children - Names and places may be new so be willing to explain - Children like hands on and action, draw concepts on a board - Write definitions on the board - Maps are useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give class a tangible cue to start class or sing a hymn - Read the lesson from the Bible - When child not behaving, stand next to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the foundational blocks, plus applications to life - Applications around playground, bus, siblings, parent expectations - Parental inclusion carries a lot of weight - Encourage parents to work on memory work and review lesson at home
Grades 5-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Looks/bodies are changing - Identity may be at odds with what they learn at church and the way they are treated at school/among peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Important to remind children of their identity in Christ as a saved child of God - Bring out the common blessings all Christians have but also that God created each of us uniquely with different gifts and abilities - Be an encourager who can build up the children - Willing to use additional commentary to add points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledge early on that the lesson may be one that is well known, but we are going to take it deeper and figure out how it applies to our lives - Acknowledge that we aren't all great singers but singing praise to God is something all Christians do - Do not allow put-downs. Remind children that in God's house we build each other up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All of the above, but applications will be about peers, phones, parents, teachers, sports - Should be able to identify with people in the lesson - May not be forthcoming with parents about lessons (7-8 especially) so the goal is to touch the child's heart and have them think back to the lesson throughout the week - Able to memorize on their own, especially with parent's encouragement



Activity: Teach to Your Audience

It's your turn to Teach to Your Audience.

Step One: What are the key goals for preschool students?

Step Two: Why might it be important to transition students from lesson summaries into reading directly from a Bible?

Step Three: Is your church able to provide Bibles to children who don't have a Bible or will the parents be expected to purchase one?

CLOSE SUNDAY SCHOOL WITH PRAYER

The end of your Sunday school class time will likely follow the schedule set by the pastor and/or Sunday school superintendent. The entire Sunday school may come together for a closing devotion or music time. Other students are dismissed directly from their classroom.

Children may have a song or hymn they have been working on that you want to sing before you dismiss the children. Songs or hymns may be sung at music time or toward the end of your Sunday school class time.

Parents or an older sibling should pick up the younger children so they are not left wandering around trying to find their family. Hopefully the parents will come so you have a moment to say hello and build that relationship—even if it is just a warm smile and quick greeting. Your Sunday school superintendent will likely set the standard for dismissing children.

At the close of your time with your Sunday school students, pray with them.

Close Sunday School With Prayer for Preschool-Kindergarteners

Prayers with preschool children and kindergarteners will be very simple. “Thank you Jesus for teaching us today... Bless us this week...” These may be the only extemporaneous prayers the children hear. Model simplicity and sincerity.

Close Sunday School With Prayer for Grades 1-4

Prayers with children in grades 1-4 develop over time.

Tie the prayers to the Sunday school lesson or Scripture verses you studied with the children.



Prayers Tied to Scripture Lessons

The Sunday school curriculum likely has printed prayers for you to read. These prayers include the key applications and truths of the lesson for children to remember.

You may also review those prayers and then write your own prayer or just pray from your heart.

You could also ask the children if they have any prayer requests. They pick up on what is going on around them and may be confused or concerned about something. Children at this age are often very willing to share what is on their heart and mind. It may be a health issue in their family or a problem in the country/world they have heard about. Remember to include prayers of thanksgiving and prayers for God's blessings.

Close Sunday School With Prayer for Grades 5-8

In grades 5-8, you have already asked the children about their week and noted what concerns they have. Prayer time at the end of Sunday school is the ideal place to address those concerns. You may also ask if there are any prayer requests from the children. Pray for a grandparent who is ill, a student who is struggling with a particular class at school, or something that is happening in the country. Don't embarrass the child by talking about their problem, but help them see how God's people bring their concerns to him in prayer.

Prayers of thanksgiving are also important if children have shared special joys. Prayers should also be tied to the Scripture lesson you studied—or even a particular Bible verse or phrase that is especially meaningful.



Activity: Close Sunday School With Prayer

It's your turn to Close Sunday School With Prayer

Step One: Write a prayer to close Sunday school for younger students after a lesson on Daniel in the lion's den.

Step Two: Write a prayer for a student's grandmother who is sick and in the hospital.

Step Three: Refer back to the three Psalm verses you selected to comfort an older student who has some anxiety. Write a prayer that incorporates the comfort of those verses.

Your Turn to Teach Sunday School

It's your turn to Teach Sunday School

Review and Exercises

Items flagged with arrows require action on your part. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section in this lesson.

Create a Welcoming Environment

- Find three Psalm verses that would offer encouragement or comfort to older students who are struggling with anxiety or loneliness.

Teach to the Audience

- Why might it be important to transition students from lesson summaries into reading directly from a Bible?

Close Sunday School With Prayer

- Write a prayer to close Sunday school for younger students after a lesson on Daniel in the lion's den.

Lesson 8: Teach Scripture at Events



Behind the Scene

Evaluate the Event Expectations and Text

Assimilate the Text

Prepare and Share the Message

Introduction

God has blessed his church with women who plan retreats or events for ladies to gather together and enjoy Christian fellowship. Some events are designed to give women a break and leave them refreshed. Many times, these events also include a time for women to gather intently around the Word and grow spiritually.

You should know that teaching Bible study is quite different from presenting God's Word at an event. However, Bible study leaders are often invited to teach Scripture at various events with a Christ-centered teaching and relevant applications. Larger audiences don't have the same opportunities for engagement, questions, and interaction so it is important to clearly teach the Word. Thoughts that are clear in your head may not "click" with others, and you'll want to be especially clear in your transitions and explanations so women can learn well.

This may be an opportunity you will have—so here are some tips to help you understand what to expect and how to do it well.

EVALUATE THE EVENT EXPECTATIONS AND TEXT

The first, obvious question you will face is whether to accept a speaking engagement to teach the Word of God to other women—and the answer isn't based on your availability. So how do you make that decision? It is an honor to be asked—and it is quite humbling. Your heart may leap with joy and excitement at the opportunity, but don't say yes quite yet. There are a few things that will point you in one direction or another as you prayerfully consider an invitation to speak.

Find out about the theme and text of the event so your decision is based on a clear understanding of your presentation topic and defined expectations. Spend time talking to someone (or several people) on the committee to clarify their purpose and goals for the event. Gather the details about where and when you would speak. Get that information in writing so you can refer to it and know it is correct. Specifically ask how long you will be presenting, or how many times you will be presenting. Create opportunities to get input from others about what they are hoping to hear. Then listen carefully about the picture they paint for the event.

If you receive information in a phone call it would be wise to write down what you heard and e-mail the person back to thank them for their time and restate what responsibilities you noted. Miscommunication happens so easily! Do everything you can to keep information and expectations clear. Don't make assumptions.

Recognize How Much the Text Will Shape the Event

Planning committees work very hard to coordinate an incredible number of details for an event. Generally, the committee will select a text to capture the purpose and key message of the retreat and then plan a theme. To varying degrees, the text and theme will be presented throughout the event.

It will be helpful for you to understand the big picture. Ask the committee to tell you about the event and listen for the priority of Scripture. Is the intent to put Scripture at the center of the hub and have everything centered in that truth? Or is it more like a pie that has slices of different things?

You want to capture the theme and purpose of the event and connect the pieces, especially if you are a key-note speaker. Make sure you see what is happening and why it has been specifically planned. Your responsibility is to teach Scripture faithfully while still being mindful of the theme and purpose of the event. Carefully evaluate whether you will be able to teach the truth of Scripture in a way that complements the intent of the event.

Identify Priorities

Ask about the purpose and goals of the event—what does the committee want for the women who attend? You might find that the planning committee has a distinct idea about what makes an event successful. There is a broad spectrum of needs and viewpoints—as numerous and varied as the people involved. You won't be able to meet all those needs, but it helps to be aware of what others are thinking.

If you able, find a way to ask participants what they hope to learn or experience. This can also help as you prepare your presentation. Understand what struggles and needs the participants have. Teach Scripture to encourage, guide, and comfort them in the hardships they face.

Evaluate how your skill set and experience line up with the intentions and needs of the committee or participants. Are they looking for a deeper, knowledgeable teacher who is equipped to answer difficult questions? Maybe they are looking for something lighter or humorous with life stories and applications. Maybe they have planned an outreach event that needs a strong, clear Gospel message with less detail and depth or expressions that are difficult for others to understand.

Ask Questions

Make sure you fully understand the event you've been asked to speak at.



Your Questions

The questions you ask about goals and logistics don't have right or wrong answers. But if you don't understand the big picture for the event it could cause disappointment and frustration (for you or the committee and participants).

You are asking about the needs of others to determine whether you are a good fit to serve as a speaker. Don't make assumptions about what they are looking for. Ask questions.

Who is hosting the event, and who will be invited? Where is it being held? Is this a first time event? Who else is speaking, and what are some of the topics or breakout groups being planned? These questions don't have right or wrong answers, but they shape your understanding of what will be happening. Who is the target audience for the retreat and what will they expect? Will there be opportunities for evangelism with women who are unchurched or will the event focus more on discipleship for women of faith who want to grow? Will women appreciate being challenged and urged to study the Word? Will they listen like Bereans?

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

Surveying the committee or participants can just be a simple e-mail. Two or three questions will provide a wealth of insight about the people who will be attending.

1. Why are you planning to attend [this event]?
2. What are you hoping the speaker talks about?
3. What do you hope to know or feel at after [this event]?

Unlike the demographical data mentioned in Lesson 3: Select the Best Bible Study, these answers will give you a more general impression rather than statistical information. Give women the chance to answer the questions in their own words so they can fully express their thoughts. These insights don't necessarily change what you teach, but they will likely change how you teach. It will show you where to start. As you strive to draw others into God's Word, you need to know where they are at physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Meet them in their weariness, fear, or bitterness and invite them to the cross of Christ.

This information will help you connect to your audience—and more importantly it will help you point them to Christ.



Before You Say "Yes"

Understand the topic or text you are speaking about. Did the committee direct you to any key points you are supposed to address?

Know the purpose of the event and the goals of the committee.

Consider whether your skill set will meet the needs of the committee and purpose of the event.

Be certain that you have adequate time to prayerfully study and prepare for the presentation.

Know where, when, and how long you are expected to teach. Get that information in writing and have it confirmed.



Activity: Evaluate the Event Expectations and Text

It's your turn to Evaluate the Event Expectations and Text.

Step One: Write out at least three questions you should ask when considering a speaking engagement.

Step Two: List two reasons you would NOT accept an invitation to speak even if you are available. (If lack of confidence or insecurity are on this list, you should talk to your pastor).

Step Three: Learn about expectations and the true need of the human heart by looking at the account of Jesus and the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-31. Do you think the young man expected a difference answer? Why was Jesus right as he pointed to the law?

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. ¹⁹ But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰ "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." ²¹ Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²² At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

ASSIMILATE THE TEXT

Inhale Scripture.

The process of studying Scripture, praying it, and assimilating it in your life is one breath and motion.

Study, pray, and trust the Holy Spirit to strengthen and teach you. Review Lesson Two: Respond with Fruitful, Christian Living to remember how sanctification works!

As you pursue this goal, think of these steps:

1. Study the text
2. Pray the text
3. Live the text

Study the Text with Reliable People and Materials

The academic knowledge you gain as you study Scripture equips you more than you can imagine. Know the text. There is a wealth of information written about the Scriptures, and the more you learn the more you realize how little you know.

Start learning. Study the materials and do your research—you will learn much more than you can share but that is your blessing! This process was covered in depth in Lesson 4: Prepare to Teach. Refer to that lesson as you prepare.

As you begin your study, write down some of your initial questions and perceptions so you can remember what you didn't know (or what you misunderstood) when you began your preparations. What words are unclear to you? You want to remember what it was like to not know the answer. Remember those things because others will come to listen and they may have little understanding, misunderstanding, or misplaced expectations. Don't forget that.



Journal Your Thoughts

Have a place where you can write down your thoughts and questions. Write your own responses to those thoughts and questions while studying and see how the Holy Spirit shapes your insights.

Keep the priorities and intentions of the event in the same place so you continue to relate what you are learning to those specific needs.

The Word of God is *“alive and active”* (Hebrews 4:12) and you will find yourself on your knees praying that God approves you as *“a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15).



The Central Message of the Text

There are many ways to apply and reflect on the text. Applications and reflections can be helpful as you continue to study the Word. But there should come a point in your study, reflection, and prayers that the central truth of God's Word will be evident. This does not refer to the many thoughts and applications for your life, or things that are personally meaningful to you. You need to know the point of the text. Clearly.

All the other points serve to draw light and attention to the truth God is revealing. There aren't four or five things God is teaching. He is teaching one thing and there are four or five applications, reflections, or prayers.

Make sure the one truth is clear.

Find a friend or mentor to study Scripture with and go out for coffee to talk about what you've been studying. Ask your friend to restate what she heard you say, or write down her questions. Mention your original questions or perceptions and talk about how God has corrected or refined your understanding. Those thoughts and questions may be points you need to include in the beginning of your presentation as you connect with your audience.



A Blessing of Spiritual Fellowship

The spiritual fellowship you share with other believers brings many blessings. One rich blessing comes as you talk about the Word of God. We are meant to encourage each other with Scripture and walk together in his truth. Talk to other believers about God's Word or find a mentor.

Where?

Many people are looking for a mentor and don't know how to find someone they can partner with as a believer. Your pastor may have an idea of someone you could take out to coffee and see how the relationship develops. You can also keep your eyes open at Bible study or while serving together at events. Are there other women who demonstrate godly wisdom, Scriptural insights, or a gentle spirit? Reach out and ask them if they have time for a chat. Talk about Scripture and spiritual growth. Let the relationship develop. It isn't necessary to have a formal mentoring program in place. Just strengthen your network of Christian friends.

Most importantly, talk with your pastor. Even as you study reliable resources, it is possible to miss the main points or find yourself struggling to restate what you've read. It is one thing to learn something and another thing to be able to teach it.

Sometimes the pastor assists with developing a retreat theme, and he may have great insights and guidance for your preparation. Sometimes he will want to see the material ahead of time to understand what is being covered. Remember to build time for those opportunities as you gauge or plan your preparation time.

This entire module is built on the expectation that you will interact with your own pastor and continue to learn from him. Get his input and direction as you select your study materials. Whether you are preparing for a Bible study, retreat, Sunday school lesson, or family devotion time, your pastor is your spiritual guide. Ask, learn, and then share your insights with him to make sure your thoughts and words are clear and true.

Pray the Text

One of the easiest ways to meditate on God's Word is to memorize it. Memorize every word of the text and repeat it on your way to work, waiting at a stop light, or while you prepare dinner. Think about it constantly. Think about each word and every concept. Then pray the text—don't pray about the text. Pray the text.



Speak God's Words to Him in Prayer

God loves to hear his children pray to him with words of Scripture. The Psalms are ancient prayers and songs that can be easily incorporated into your times of prayer and meditation. This is an easy place to start.

*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139:14)*

*When I said, 'My foot is slipping,' your love, O Lord, supported me.
When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul. (Psalm 94:18,19).*

Many passages in Scripture can be used as prayers by changing the pronouns to make it personal or suitable for a group.

Lord, you forgive all my sins and heal all my diseases; you redeem my life from the pit and crown me with love and compassion. (Psalm 103:3)

Refer to the section on prayer in Lesson Two: Respond with Fruitful Christian Living. Here is another example of how you can reflect on a text and pray it:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. (Romans 12:10a)

Lord God, you are such a devoted Father. With great faithfulness you have shown yourself to be the One who is Love. What a privilege it is for me to receive your devoted love. Thank you, God. Find me eternally grateful for the rich love and devotion you have poured out through Jesus my Savior. Let me reflect your loving devotion to others. Let my love draw others to you and see the grace and love you give so freely.

Forgive me Lord for the many times I don't feel brotherly love or lack the love and devotion you desire. Give me an eagerness to show love and devotion to others for your glory. I want to think that I love every soul for which you died—but in my heart I know I do not. Open my eyes to the opportunities I have to be devoted to others in brotherly love. Urge me Lord—don't let me look past people who need your love. Prompt me—then remind me that I have asked you to help me respond with lavish love. Stir within me a desire to do your will for your glory and the good of your kingdom. Amen.

Learn it, pray it, and live it before you talk about it.

Memorize as much of the text as you can. Put notes in your day timer or on your phone. As the truth of God's Word settles on your heart, you will find your mind churning with thoughts as you meditate on similar passages or insights from Scripture. Learn to meditate by finding quiet time to consider why God revealed or recorded the words of the text. What does he want you to learn or do? How does this section or teaching of Scripture shape your life?

Live the Text

Trust the Holy Spirit to do his work in shaping your life. Learn God's clear truth from a personal perspective. This does not mean your thoughts or wisdom shape how you understand God's Word. Rather, God's truth and wisdom breathe life into your soul and transform your life and thinking.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1,2)

You don't shape the Word but you will teach it more clearly if it has shaped you. Speak from your heart and soul but make certain that your heart and soul have been refined with the truth of the Word and the guidance of the Spirit.

There is a little bad news here.

As you yield to the truth of God's Word and humbly ask to be taught before you lead others, God will answer your prayers. You may not like all his answers. As you pray to understand Scripture more clearly, God may draw light to sins that you have casually dismissed or left buried in denial. Can you teach about selflessness, joy, or the sacraments without first being sifted as wheat?

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. (Luke 22:31,32)

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

¹³ *Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you. (Psalm 51:12,13)*

God will lead you as you prepare for your presentation—and he will start by speaking to your heart and life. Martin Luther wrote about this learning with three words, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio." His long-standing insight points to prayer ("Oratio"), meditation ("Meditatio") and affliction ("Tentatio"). Pray to understand the text, meditate on Scripture, and expect trials and hardships. You may (or may not) want to know that Luther emphasized affliction.

"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:7).



When God Uses a Life to Prepare a Message

The story of Hosea is a perfect example of how God teaches and works through people to proclaim his message.

Hosea was a prophet in Israel at a time when God's people were being unfaithful to the Lord. God could have sent Hosea to preach a message of repentance and condemnation, but instead, the book of Hosea records a personal demonstration of God's faithful love.

God directed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. After bearing Hosea's children, the woman returned to her life of prostitution. But at God's command, Hosea bought her back and restored her as his wife. What a powerful picture of God's faithfulness and forgiveness! Hosea teaches a clear message about who God is and spotlights his merciful love.

But this message isn't just an historical account we need to know. It doesn't simply teach another attribute of God that we can list under his name. It is a message for hearts that need to be reminded of God's love when they sin. It turns our aching hearts to confidently trust in God because he is faithful when we are not. It points us to see God's work of salvation—we are lost and he is the faithful Savior who draws us to himself.

God may speak to you through the account of Hosea to see your own unfaithfulness and feel its sting. He may point to your unwillingness to forgive other sinners. You may imagine that you are the righteous prophet—when in reality you are the adulteress. He may prompt you to reach out to someone who has hurt you with forgiveness and acceptance—and it may be very painful. This equips you to serve with humility.

As the text becomes part of your thinking and living, the central truth will become more evident. Consider whether God is telling you what you should do (this is the law) or if God is telling you what he is giving you (this is part of the gospel).

Does the text make you more aware of your shortcomings or God's infinite love?

This is one of the most difficult tasks in presenting the text.

It is also the most important.



Activity: Assimilate the Text

It's your turn to Assimilate the Text

Step One: Write down the question(s) to ask when you are considering whether a text is a message of the law or the gospel.

Step Two: List three things you could pray about when reflecting on 1 Peter 1:7

These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Step Three: List three or four things you could think or pray about when reflecting on Romans 12:1 and identify the most important point.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

PREPARE AND SHARE THE MESSAGE

You will invest a considerable amount of time learning the text. Study and pray for wisdom, talk about it with your pastor, and share what you learn with others. See the central message and identify the messages of law and gospel, pray the text, and know in your heart what it means.

But you aren't done.

If you stop here, you will receive the greatest blessings of Scripture with strengthened faith and the power of the Holy Spirit. But now your goal is to communicate what you've learned to others. Now that you understand the power and amazing truth of God's Word, you need to spend time learning about the best way to communicate those treasures to others.

Don't let these final steps be a stumbling block to the truth God has given you to share. The Spirit will work through the Word, but your intentional effort in these final steps will bless those who hear God's Word from your lips.

There are three things to do: adapt your presentation to reach different learning styles, prepare your materials, and practice your presentation to know long it is.

Adapt Presentation to Reach Different Learning Styles

After you have studied the text and made notes, you will have a ton of information that makes sense to you. Now you need to consider how various types of learners can best understand what you teach.

The materials in Lesson Four: Prepare to Teach help you reach a variety of learners. Review the section on step learners, create learners, research learners, and talk learners. Remember to identify the learning objectives for your presentation (this material is also in the same lesson) so you know the key points that need to be communicated in a variety of ways.

Prepare Your Printed and Visual Materials

Contact a committee member to make sure you know what format(s) they would like to receive your materials.

If there are PowerPoint presentations for the event, you may want to include your own slides to make your key points, illustrate applications, and help visual learners. You may want to ask the committee if they would like you to use their themed slide templates or at least ask about the colors they plan to use. Other times, you may have a specific layout for the slides. The book, "Rule the Room" by Jason Teteak has some excellent tips for PowerPoint slides.

If there are handouts, make sure you know the deadline to have those materials turned in. Double check for typos (have a friend proof read your copy) and leave lots of white space for participants to write answers. Use a readable font and size to assist your learners in every way possible.

Other resources, like maps or lists, should also be included with your handout in the same font/size so it is clear that they go together. You may want to include your contact information in the footer so people can reach you.

Review Lesson Four: Prepare to Teach and note the section, “Plan Logistics and Make Final Preparations.” You will find important information to review.

Practice Presentation Length

Some people write out their entire presentation word for word to make sure they teach clearly, use good transitions or examples, and have a solid conclusion. This is wise if you are just starting since you may get rattled and forget what to say.

With experience, some presenters just write an outline with key phrases, words, transitions, and examples.

Any way you do it (and there are many ways to write notes), it is important that you have a solid introduction, know your key points, and have a very solid conclusion.

Practice your presentation out loud. Simply imagine that you are talking to someone and share the insights you have learned. When you are starting to give presentations, you will likely practice when you are alone. Focus on speaking clearly to the key points of the text and make sure you know what words, phrases and examples you want to include.

Then look for an opportunity to visit with a friend or your pastor to share the main points of your presentation. Ask them if you can share what you’ve learned and hope to present at an upcoming event. Listen carefully to their feedback—don’t dismiss it or make excuses. Give it thoughtful consideration.

Know how long you have for each section of your presentation. If you have a one-hour presentation, break up your time slots for the introduction, key parts and conclusion. Refer to “Plan Key Parts of the Lesson” in Lesson 4: Prepare to Teach for a reminder on how to plan your time. If you have 12-15 minutes for each key point you could practice each section separately. Watch the clock—you have 12 minutes to explain the key point of the text. Work through each section.

Be thoughtful to the timelines set for the event agenda. You want to stay within the allotted time you have been given. Others have prepared for their time slot also—or someone has intentionally prepared lunch to be served at a set time!

It is Essential to Arrive Early

There are several important reasons to arrive early.

1. It contributes to a relaxed and secure environment.
2. It allows for relational ministry opportunities and conversations.
3. It gives you time to address last minute details.

This event isn't just about what you have to say. People are ministry. Talk to committee members and thank them for their work and commitment to God's kingdom work. Seek out women you have been in contact with via phone or e-mail to personally say hello. Recognize that committee members and other speakers have also been studying God's Word under the same theme. Humbly appreciate the insights and encouragement of others. If you are able/comfortable, speak to the participants at the event to find out more about your audience.

Ultimately, the details are a final obstacle that must be addressed! Check your mic early. Ask what type of microphone you will use—lapel and handheld microphones each require some flexibility, because you need to wear the right clothes or one hand will be tied up holding a mic. Hearing impairments are very common, especially in large rooms. Ask someone on the committee to wave at you from the back if they can't hear so you don't have to keep asking "can you hear me?" Be mindful of those who can't hear well in a large room!

Check your PowerPoint slides (if applicable). Be aware of font changes or screen sizes that will impact how your slides appear. If you chose a unique font be sure it shows up correctly when loaded. Think about your back up plan if the internet at the venue is unreliable.

Be physically aware of the setting: Where do your notes go? Will you hold them? Where is the clock so you can check the time? Where is the best place to stand?

Finally, be yourself.

You are a called, holy vessel of God's grace. The Holy Spirit is IN you. You can be confident in God's gifts and the power of his Word yet still remain humble as a redeemed sinner. Trust the Holy Spirit's work and God's promises about Scripture. Continue to pray that God's Word would touch the hearts and lives of those who are listening. Remember that the power of your presentation is directly related to God's Word.



Activity: Prepare and Share the Message

It's your turn to Prepare and Share the Message

Step One: Where do you keep track of important dates and deadlines? Will you need to set reminders for yourself or find a place to keep the details of your event handy?

Step Two: What are some fundamental elements to remember when thinking about learning styles? What are some basic ways that people learn?

Step Three: Who would listen to you share your presentation prior to the event?

Your Turn to Teach Scripture at Events

It's your turn to Teach Scripture at Events

Review and Exercises

Items flagged with arrows require action on your part. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section in this lesson.

Evaluate the Event Expectations and Text

- Write out at least three questions you should ask when considering a speaking engagement.

Assimilate the Text

- List three or four things you could think or pray about when reflecting on Romans 12:1 (below) and identify the most important point.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Prepare and Share the Message

- Who would listen to you share your presentation prior to the event?

Lesson 9: Point to Christ in Conversations



Let Jesus Pour Out of You

Say Hi!

Speak Genuine God-Speak

Connect and Be There

Introduction

The most frequent place women share the message and love of Christ is in everyday conversations. Conversations often happen naturally and are delightfully refreshing! As a Christian you want your conversations to be filled with grace, truth, and encouragement. You know what is important: Jesus and people. You want to be purposeful about connecting with people—and genuine in sharing God’s love. New acquaintances and dear friends provide ample opportunity for women to share their hearts and love with others.

When you meet a new person at church or in the community, you have an opportunity to create a friendship and demonstrate God’s love. Whether it is in the back of church or at a park, if you see someone you don’t know reach out to say hi! Start a conversation and be nice!



Community Involvement

Your participation in community groups or events is a great place to meet other people. Sign your child up for soccer, get involved with your local library, or take a cooking class so you can build relationships with others. Help out at your public school, host a book club, or have a neighborhood party. Volunteer at the local hospital or hospice program—or visit elderly patients at a nursing home. Be intentional as you actively look for opportunities to share the grace of God.

Other times, conversations deepen the bonds of a long-time friendship. In ongoing friendships, women have opportunities to share Scripture, offer God's wisdom, and nurture spiritual growth. Make time for those relationships and recognize their importance.

This lesson helps you continue conversations that point to Christ and build friendships that will nurture faith in others.

SAY HI!

Start the Conversation

Introduce yourself to a stranger. It might seem scary to start a conversation with someone you don't know, but the more you do it the easier it gets!

Be proactive by being aware of how you present yourself. When you smile at people and stand or sit with inviting confidence, people are often eager (or at least willing!) to talk with you. This is part of being welcoming to others. If you sit with your arms crossed and a straight-face, people won't see you as approachable. Posture and present yourself as someone who would be pleasant to talk to.

Of course resuming a conversation with a good friend is just a continued conversation from the last time you talked! You are richly blessed if you have friends that can pick up a conversation right where you left off! Many of these conversations get deep quickly because of the trust and understanding that have been nurtured in the relationship.



Fundamental Communication Skills

There are several basic communication skills that help you be effective and stay engaged in conversations.

1. **Be an active listener.** Pay attention to what someone is saying. Smile or nod to affirm what they say. Think about what they are saying—not what you are going to say next.
2. **Paraphrase.** In a casual conversation this will be less concise than in conflict resolution, but it is still a helpful skill. Let the other person know you are listening to what they say. For example:
 “It sounds like you have a beautiful family!”
 “Oh, you have your plate full!”
 “Your job sounds awesome, I hope that continues to go well!”
3. **Eye contact.** Make eye contact throughout the conversation, but be aware that constant eye contact may seem a bit intimidating to some. If you don’t look directly in their eyes, you can look at their face—this is less direct but still shows engagement.

Ask a Prompting Question and Expand the Thoughts

The easiest way to continue a conversation is to ask questions about a person and then get them to expand on those thoughts. Prompt them to tell you more about something. Ask how or why questions.

- Tell me more about that.
- How did that work out?
- Why did you make that choice?

Practice these skills when you're in conversation. After you walk away from the conversation, ask yourself how well you think you did on those skills. Continue to practice them in conversations, and you will improve those skills.

Find Common Ground and Follow Up

Listen for experiences, interests, or values that are similar to your own. This will make conversation easier and form a connection. Listen for things that you can relate to (or have wanted to know about) and share your thoughts on the common ground you share. This is a great place to develop the conversation and start building a relationship.

In the conversation, you may hear a person talk about a need they have. They may identify the need directly, or it may become clear to you as you listen to them talk. Make a mental note of their need and think about whether there is something you can do to help them. Helping people where they have a need is a beautiful act of faith and Christian service.

Sometimes a conversation becomes comfortable very quickly and you see opportunities to talk about spiritual things. It might be as simple as "My faith is important" or "We go to church down the street." You could share how God helped you through a similar situation or what your thoughts are (on a particular topic) as a Christian. Hopefully you can talk more about Christ or invite the person to church, but many times you are just building a relationship.



Moments to Mentor (from WELS Women's Ministry)

- Every relationship is one that God intends for you to impact with his grace
- Sinner and saint is the common thread we all share
- Simply pass on what was shared with you
- Talk about what is on their mind, don't feel like it has to be "spiritual." God works in and cares about every part of our lives
- Listen carefully—do they need to hear warning or comfort?
- Are you sharing God's opinion or yours? Pray to speak the words of Jesus.
- Trust that God works through his Word.

At the end of the conversation, repeat their name to help you remember, "Thanks for chatting Sue, I look forward to talking to you again!" Let them know how much you enjoyed visiting with them.

Though it takes time to nurture relationships, look for ways to follow up with someone soon after you chat. Figure out how you can continue to connect with them. Are they on Facebook, or did you get their phone number? You want to lead the way and be proactive in reaching out. Ask if they would like to go out for coffee sometime or go on a walk. Could your common interests provide an opportunity to meet again? Work to create that connection.



Activity: Say Hi!

It's your turn to Say Hi!

Step One: List three places where you have opportunities to meet people, and identify how can you be approachable in those settings.

Step Two: How might you give a silent witness to others? What is hanging on the walls of your home, or what is on your desk at work? What clothing or jewelry do you wear that reflects your faith? Is that something you would like to do better so others become aware of your faith?

Step Three: What coffee shop or restaurant near you has a place to meet someone where you could have a quiet or personal conversation?

SPEAK GENUINE GOD-SPEAK

Whether a friendship is new or old, there are lots of things to talk about with a friend. One blessing of friendship is the honesty and openness that happens in conversations. Not every conversation has to be about Jesus, but if you know that your friend needs a Savior, his name will not be far from your lips.

As conversations continue, you will have more and more opportunities to mention the peace of forgiveness or the comfort of God's Word. Move toward spiritual topics as you are able with a desire to share God's Word with your friend. This will happen quickly in some friendships—other times it takes a while. Be patient.

Once the friendship has developed to a place of trust and encouragement, suggest getting together to discuss a devotion, the sermon from Sunday, or a section of Scripture. There won't be a "magic moment" to suggest this, and your friend may initially be hesitant. If she isn't comfortable yet, look for another way to encourage her with Scripture. There are lots of ways you can do this, and you want to wait for her to be ready.

Share Scripture with One Another

Meet with your friend regularly if you can. If your friend lives nearby or is attending your church, you can meet to talk about something from a recent worship service. You could talk about the Scripture readings, the sermon, or the hymns. You might get together to read and discuss a devotion book or a Bible study book. You could read sections of Scripture that would be especially helpful if your friend has a particular struggle. You might need to start by simply sharing some of the things you have been learning as you study the Word. Lesson One: Stand Secure in Grace and Truth will continue to direct you in studying Scripture.

If you are nurturing a relationship from a distance you might find the YouVersion app helpful! You can begin a Bible reading or devotion plan together. You can share a Christian song or devotional podcast. Be intentional about including Scripture in your conversations together.

Remind your friend of God's promises and unfailing faithfulness.



Resources to Help You Share Scripture With Others

The YouVersion app will allow you to begin a Bible reading or devotion plan together.

The Bible Promise Book published by Barbour and Company Inc. or Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling published by Baker Books provides a list of Scripture verses to help in various situations.

Pray With Them and For Them

Spend time praying with your friend. At the close of your time together, pray about the things you talked about. Pray for any situations in your lives that need the strength and comfort of God. Pray about the Scripture or devotion you read, and thank God for your time together to talk about the Word.

Continue to pray for your friend privately at home. You may want to send her a text or note to let her know you are continuing to pray, especially if she is going through a difficult time.

Review Lesson Two: Respond With Fruitful, Christian Living to develop your prayer life.

Share Your Story

Talk about how God has worked in your life. You don't have to be afraid to admit that you also have struggles or hardships. You will likely have experiences where God has shown his faithfulness in your life or times that his Word has brought exceptional comfort. Share your story as a testimony of God's goodness.



Mentor for a Lifetime (from WELS Women's Ministry)

- Open your Bible. Open your life. Show others how God lives in his people.
- Share struggles, failures, triumphs and insights; point to God's faithfulness .
- Listen openly to understand what they feel and see.
- Continue to ask questions and restate, "Tell me more..." or, "It sounds like..."
- Discuss similar situations in Scripture and find helpful passages.
- Be together casually and intentionally; genuine caring builds trust.
- Transformation happens on the inside, that's your focus.
- Pray with them and be patient, growth takes time for all of us.
- Live the relationship infused with Christ, he is their greatest need.



Activity: Speak Genuine God-Speak

It's your turn to Speak Genuine God-Speak

Step One: Look for a Bible app on your phone that will help you easily share Bible verses or share a devotion. If you don't have one, try YouVersion.

Step Two: Start a journal of prayer requests for others so you remember to pray for them and keep track of what they need.

Step Three: Write down several verses that have been helpful to you in times of suffering or sadness.

CONNECT AND BE THERE

Faithful companionship is a powerful affirmation of friendship. Some friendships need more consistent connections—other friends can pick it right up after a year of no communication. Learn what is best for each friendship.

Reach out When They Are On Your Mind

There will be times that your friend comes to mind as you are going through your day. Maybe she will come to mind in your prayer time, or you notice her name in your prayer journal.

Reach out to your friend at those times with a call, text, or e-mail. You can simply tell her that you thought of her or prayed for her. If you prayed for her, tell her what you prayed about.

Send Encouraging Texts and Notes

Scripture passages and notes of encouragement are always a blessing. Share those as often as you can! Make a note in your day timer to remember who might need texts, prayers, or notes at a particular time.

Be There For Your Friend

There are times in this life when it feels like things are falling apart. Those times of suffering look different in each person's life, but everyone faces hardship.

As a sister in Christ, you want to support your friends through difficulty. If something comes up and you are able to drop everything to be at her side, it is a great blessing. Show her your love and support by being there. You don't always need a lot of words in those moments—your presence will speak volumes of love.

Unfortunately, it may be hard to get away and be by your friend. Do your best to express your love and support. Send her Bible passages or write a prayer to send her. Pray with her over the phone, send flowers, or just cry with her. Tender moments of friendship come naturally from hearts bound in faith and love.

Trust that God will comfort your friend with his love. Remember that the Holy Spirit dwells within her and the Word will strengthen her. Continue to keep her in your prayers but entrust her to the Lord who never fails his people.



Activity: Connect and Be There

It's your turn to Connect and Be There

Step One: Do you have phone numbers and e-mail addresses handy for your friends?

Step Two: Take several pictures of Bible passages that are underlined in your personal Bible that you could send to your friend for encouragement.

Step Three: Do you have notecards or something to send a friend if they come to mind? Have something handy for those times (don't forget stamps!).

Your Turn to Point to Christ in Conversations

It's your turn to Point to Christ in Conversations

Review and Exercises

Items flagged with arrows require action on your part. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section in this lesson.

Say Hi!

- List five things that are important to you and may be good connection points for conversations with others.

Share Scripture with Others

- Look for a Bible app on your phone that will help you easily share Bible verses or share a devotion. If you don't have one, try YouVersion.

Connect and Be There

- Do you have notecards or something to send a friend if they come to mind? Have something handy for those times (don't forget stamps!).

Appendix

Lesson 1: Biblical Timeline to Understand Context

There are several excellent timelines at understandchristianity.com/timelines.

The screenshot shows the 'TIMELINES' page on the Understand Christianity website. The page has a dark header with the site's logo and navigation links: Teachings, Bible, Lingo, Timelines (selected), FAQ, a search icon, and a user icon. Below the header, there's a breadcrumb trail: 'You are here: Home / Timelines'. A secondary navigation bar offers 'All / Old Testament Timelines / New Testament Timelines'. The main content area displays ten thumbnail images, each with a caption: 'Timeline of Salvation History' (a globe with a cross), 'Chronology of Jesus' Life and Ministry' (a woman's back), 'Chronology of the Old Testament Books' (an open Bible), 'Chronology of the New Testament Books' (Greek text), 'Composite of the Four Gospels' (a map), 'Paul's First and Second Missionary Journeys' (a world map), 'Paul's Third Missionary Journey' (a world map), 'Genesis Genealogical Charts' (a family tree), 'Chronology of the Flood' (a Noah's Ark), and 'The Events of Holy Week' (a city map).

Lesson 1: [Ninety-Five Theses for the Twenty-First Century](#)

Free downloadable resource for personal or group Bible study.

Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses undoubtedly changed Christian teaching forever. Ninety-five Theses for the 21st Century is a new booklet that seeks to affirm these Lutheran beliefs and address today's religious and spiritual issues with a consistently Lutheran outlook. The booklet was developed by a worldwide association of Lutheran churches called the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC).

Lesson 1: Reliable Resources For Your Personal Bible Study

Suggestions for Your Personal Library and/or Personal Study

- At least one good study bible with notes such as the *Lutheran Study Bible* (ESV), the *EHV Study Bible*, or *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (NIV 84).
- A concordance if there isn't one in your Bible
- The *People's Bible* available at NPH.net
- *Bible History Commentary* (three volumes), Werner H. Franzmann
- *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* by Walter Roehrs and Martin Franzmann

Lesson 2: Samples of the *People's Bible*

People's Bible: 1,2 Timothy and Titus by Armin Schuetze, Northwestern Publishing House (p. 40-42)

A Word to the Women

⁹ I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

Having addressed the men, Paul similarly now addresses the women. Again as herald and apostle he is speaking not only what he "wants" but what God wants.

Paul wants Christian women to know what truly makes them beautiful in the eyes of God and of their fellow Christians. How one dresses may reveal what one thinks, what is important in life, what is in the heart. "To dress modestly, with decency and propriety" does not call for clothing that is unattractive, drab, uncomely, or an appearance that is slovenly and unkempt. Rather, it speaks of a sense of what is proper and in good taste. It shows good judgment, recognizing what is decent and proper according to God's standards. Thus it can give evidence of a heart in which Christ dwells by faith.

On the other hand, hair "braided" in a way to attract undue attention, striking golden jewelry and pearls, and expensive clothes that make a show of riches may tell the observer about a woman's vanity and a preoccupation with displaying and making a show of her physical beauty. It may reveal a heart that is centered on self and wealth.

Christian women are to adorn themselves "with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God." Their beauty is not simply external but a beauty of the heart that expresses itself in doing works that are pleasing to God.

Peter, addressing Christian wives, similarly describes their true beauty: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful" (1 Peter 3:3-5). Peter referred to the example of Sarah. Paul could have cited examples like Lydia (Acts 16:14,15), Phoebe and Priscilla (Romans 16:1-4), and many others.

Proverbs 31:10-31 gives a comprehensive description of a “wife of noble character.” Also today Christian women will seek to appear truly beautiful in a way that far surpasses mere external beauty as they live lives of faith, love, and service that reveal their true inner self.

¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Paul looks at a teaching-learning situation. Since Christians have been instructed to teach “everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20), there will be many such situations in the church and among Christians. “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.” In speaking of submission, Paul is applying a general principle regarding the relation of man and woman to the specific teaching- learning situation. He presents the principle and its divine origin in the verses that follow.

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” Here Paul states the principle and makes an application. The application is that a woman is not to teach; she must be silent. The principle is that a woman is not “to have authority over a man.” Paul is not setting up a rule or law that prohibits all teaching by women. The concern is that she not teach when her teaching violates the “authority” principle.

Lesson 2: Samples of the *People's Bible Teachings*

Baptism by Gaylin Schmeling, Northwestern Publishing House (p. 53-56)

Baptism as New Birth

In baptism God promises and gives us all the salvation treasures Christ won for us on the cross. These treasures are received only through faith. As Jesus said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Faith is like a hand that receives all the benefits that Christ won for us and that are offered to us in baptism. Without faith, baptism would not personally benefit us, even though baptism itself is a great divine treasure. Baptism offers all the blessings of Christ's redemptive work whether or not we believe in it, but its blessings become our own only through faith.

Faith that receives the blessings of baptism is impossible for humans to attain by themselves. We were all born spiritually dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). We came from our mothers' wombs physically alive, but we were spiritually stillborn. We were born living yet at the same time dead, dead in the sin inherited from our first parents. Concerning this total corruption of the human nature, called original sin, David says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). Our hearts were totally opposed to God and his will for our lives. Therefore, we could not decide to follow Jesus or believe in him. As a physically dead person cannot make decisions, so a spiritually dead person cannot make spiritual decisions. "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

According to Scripture every person is born of God who believes that Jesus is the only Savior from sin (1 John 5:1). Without this spiritual rebirth through faith, called regeneration, a person is not fit for the kingdom of heaven and upon death will enter the horrors of eternal separation from God in hell. Jesus told Nicodemus, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

Baptism works rebirth

Baptism, which requires faith, also creates faith. Baptism is regenerative, which means it gives rebirth. Paul writes, "[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). We know this passage refers to baptism because baptism is the only washing the Lord has directed his church to use. Baptism is the washing of rebirth because through it the Holy Spirit creates faith, making us spiritually alive, and thus saves us (1 Peter 3:21). Rebirth, or regeneration, is essentially the bestowal of faith, for whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1, John 1:12,13).

Paul confirms the fact that baptism is regenerative, that it works faith, when he tells the Galatians that by putting on Christ in baptism, they become God's

children through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26,27). Paul expresses this same truth, using different language, in Colossians, where he explains that in baptism God puts to death our sinful flesh, burying it with Christ, so that baptism is for us a watery grave. At the same time, we arise to new life through faith worked in baptism by the power of Christ's resurrection. "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11,12). If we are raised with Christ through faith in baptism, then baptism certainly creates faith and new life.

In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus pointed out that a person must be born again to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The heart, mind, and soul must be completely transformed. Nicodemus understood Jesus' words as referring to physical birth and wondered how he could enter his mother's womb a second time and be born. Jesus answered Nicodemus' question in a simple and comprehensive way: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). To be born of water and the Spirit must refer to baptism. In the Greek text, *water* and *Spirit* are grammatically linked in such a way that they are to be thought of not as two separate things but as two things joined together into a unit. Only in baptism does the Scripture connect the Spirit with water; people are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Only baptism is spoken of as a "washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit comes to a person in the baptismal waters and brings about spiritual rebirth by working faith in the person's heart. Baptism is a means through which a person spiritually dead in sin can be brought to a living faith in the Savior. In the heart where faith has already been worked through the Word (Romans 10:17), baptism strengthens and confirms that faith. Baptism then not only brings all the benefits of Christ's cross to us, but at the same time it works the faith to receive those benefits.

The church has always taught that baptism works faith and new birth. This is how the early Christian teacher Justin Martyr, who died in approximately AD165, understood baptism:

We lead them to a place where there is water, and they are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated. In the name of God, the Father and Lord of all, and of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ said: "Unless you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."⁶

⁶ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* I:61, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 6 (New York: Christian Heritage, Inc., 1948), p. 99.

Lesson 2: Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers

I thank you my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger. Keep me this day also from sin and every evil that all my doings and life may please you. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

I thank you my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Lesson 3: Common Needs listed by people groups

- Young children – playing, making friends, learning about Jesus, singing
- Preteens – having fun, making friends
- Teens – how to maneuver in their high school years, how to be faithful to their confirmation vows in a brave new world, make friends, continue friendships begun in elementary school or confirmation class, how to have “their own club” and manage things on their own for the first time, find a safe place to discuss worldly things without being judged, have fun, dating
- College aged – make friends/continue friendships, discuss world events in a trusting environment, explore and have fun, share experiences, dating
- 20-something – how to “do church” for the first time after their parents step back, have fun, build a career and make so many new decisions, choosing a mate, making a difference in the world, applying the book learning they’ve had for so many years, managing finances/pay back college debt, meet others in similar situations
- Young married – have fun, having children and when, building careers, managing finances, building a network
- Moms – wholesome activities for the kids, school choices and advice, grown-up time, socializing, good friends for the kids to play with, sharing “mom” experiences
- Non-member school/preschool moms – same as moms, getting to know more about the faith of those who are teaching their children,
- Working/professional – balancing home/social life and a career, dealing with difficult bosses and co-workers, managing the pressures of being a Christian in an unchristian world, down-time, making friends and building a network
- Stay at home – possibly being a mom, socialization, finding a positive outlet for your gifts and hobbies, desire to serve
- Hobbies – the desire to gather with others who share the same hobby (painting, sewing, crafting, gardening, music, etc.)
- Special needs individuals – varies with their capabilities but usually socialization; their parents and caregivers may well voice the need for a support group to help them with caring for this individual.
- Support groups – the desire to gather with others who are addressing similar issues such as being a caregiver, addictions, illnesses, divorce, or loss of a spouse or child.
- Retired/senior – socialization, desire for continued spiritual growth (making up for previous phases of life when there never seemed to be enough time), having fun, learning new skills in the fast-paced world of technology and communications

- New immigrants – get to know the customs and people of their new country, sharing their way of life with others, working in an unfamiliar environment, how everything works, (e.g. banking, money and credit cards, government permits, doctors, the religion of their new country, etc.)
- Those needing to learn English
- What your church neighborhood looks like and what might be appealing to them
- Cross-generational women in all types of situations – while this is a broad category, it is interesting to see how a different generation experiences life, learns, thinks, communicates yet faces the same needs from their God

As you begin planning a group study of Scripture, do not assume everyone in your audience feels the same needs and desires as you do. It's important to probe into members of that group to understand where they are coming from and what would catch their interest in joining the planned study.

Lesson 3: Four Ways to Survey a Bible Study Group

Here are four different ways to survey a group. Talk to your pastor to see if he has a preference, or what might work best. He may also direct you to survey tools the congregation already has in place such as a Survey Monkey account.

1. Conversations are the simplest way to survey participants but remember to ask clear, consistent questions and record the answers when you are able.
2. E-mails that sent to the participants will give you responses in writing but be mindful of privacy regulations. Enter the e-mail addresses on the Bcc (blind carbon copy) to protect the privacy of the participants.
3. Paper copies can be distributed in a newsletter or service folder if the target audience is large (e.g., women or school moms).
4. Electronic survey tools or apps are prevalent and will often tally or analyze the responses for you.

Lesson 3: Four Tips When Surveying a Bible Study Group

To properly and effectively survey a group, keep these four tips in mind:

1. Identify the purpose of the survey and who to contact if there are questions or comments. Clarify what you will do with the results.
2. Keep it brief.
3. Use a limited number of multiple choice options that are clear and specific. Only offer viable options (e.g., don't offer daycare or snacks if you don't have someone to provide those options).
4. Note when the survey will end, follow up quickly with your pastor to discuss the responses, and announce the plans after getting input.

Lesson 3: Sample Questions for Bible Study Surveys

Bible Study survey questions may address logistical issues such as:

1. What day of the week is best for you to attend Bible study?
(list the days that will work: Mon., Tue., Thur., Fri., Sat.)
2. What time of the day is best for you to attend Bible study?
(give specific options: 8:00 am, 6:30 pm, etc.)
3. How long would you like Bible study to last?
(1 hours? 1.5 hours? Up to 2 hours? – remember to respect this request)
4. Do you need daycare in order to attend Bible study?
(if yes, leave a place for them to list the number and ages of children)
5. Do you need transportation?
(if yes, leave a place for them to list their address)
6. Would you like to have snacks at Bible study?
(if yes, leave a place for them to note dietary needs)
7. Please list any additional needs you have so we may help you participate in Bible study.
(leave a place for comments)
8. Do you have any specific expectations you would like to share so we are aware of what you're looking for?
(leave a place for comments)

Bible Study survey questions may also address topical issues such as:

1. What type of material would you like to study? Check all that apply:
Book of the Bible (please suggest a book)
Topical study (please suggest a topic)
Doctrinal study (please suggest a topic)
2. Do you have any specific recommendations or ideas for a study?
(leave room for a suggestion)

Lesson 3: Two Bible Study Surveys

Here are two surveys formatted and ready to print. Be sure to include your name and contact information at the bottom. If possible, print them on church letterhead or include your church logo and address at the top of the page.

Survey 1 – for small groups that have already met

Survey 2 – for small groups that are new

Hello Sisters in Christ,

As our Bible study group completes our current study we have a great opportunity to assess how we are doing and how we could to improve our time in Scripture.

Please take a moment to answer a few questions below. I will discuss your feedback with Pastor share any helpful information within 3 weeks. If you have any concerns or something you would like to privately discuss, don't hesitate to reach out to me!

Rate these three items on a scale of 1-5 (one is low, five is high).

Is the day of the week convenient for you?1 2 3 4 5

Is the time of day convenient for you?.....1 2 3 4 5

Is the length of the study workable for you?.....1 2 3 4 5

Please make any additional comments below:

Strengths of this Bible study group

Weaknesses of this Bible study group

Do you have any unmet needs or expectations we could address?

Hello Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for expressing interest in our new Bible study group! As we begin this study we would like to get your input so we can meet your needs and expectations.

Please take a moment to answer the questions below. Your (anonymous) responses will be discussed with Pastor within 3 weeks. You can expect to hear an update on our Bible study soon after! If you have any concerns or something you would like to privately discuss, don't hesitate to reach out to me!

1. What day of the week is best for you to attend Bible study?
Please circle the days that work best for you: M T W Th F Sat. Sun
2. What time of the time is best for you to attend Bible study?
Please circle times that work best for you: 8AM, 9AM. 6:30PM, 7:00PM
3. How long would you like Bible to last?
Please circle the length that works best for you: 1 hour, 1.5 hours, 2 hours
4. Do you need daycare in order to attend Bible study?
Please circle your answer: No Yes
If yes, please indicate the names and ages of the children:
5. Do you need transportation?
Please circle your answer: No Yes
If yes, please indicate your address: _____
6. Would you like to have snacks at Bible study?
Please circle your answer: No Yes
If yes, please indicate your dietary needs _____
7. Please list any additional needs you have so we may help you participate in Bible study.
8. Do you have any specific expectations you would like to share so we are aware of what you're looking for?

Lesson 3: Discernment in Selecting Bible Study Material

Purpose of a Bible Study

The purpose of a Bible study is to grow spiritually. We are told in 2 Peter 3:17,18 to “be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

In today’s world, the word “spiritual” is often misused or has been redefined to mean nothing more than an emotional, self-defined human-divine relationship. This is not the type of spiritual growth we are talking about. Rather, we seek to learn more and more about the true God revealed to us in the Bible. Through this type of spiritual growth, the blessings of the Holy Spirit, both in terms of faith and the fruits of faith, expand to fill our lives. As we learn more about God’s unfathomable love for us, we learn to depend on his promises and the comfort and courage they give us. As we search the Scriptures, we develop a devotion to God that becomes intimately linked to every aspect of our lives. This continual growth is the goal of a Bible study.

God has given us his Holy Word and has told us to search and study, putting into practice what we learn. He has also given gifts of writing, encouragement, understanding and teaching to some of his people. Through their gifts we can learn more about the Bible and how to apply its teachings to our lives. This also is valuable in our path of spiritual growth though their words will always be secondary to the Bible. Like the Bereans (Acts 17), we must hold those who write or speak about Scripture to a very high standard so that what they say does not add to God’s Word, misrepresent it, or overlook important parts of it.

Bible Study Material with Integrity

All spiritual material written by humans will come with differing theologies. God has blessed the WELS tremendously by giving us highly trained pastors and professors who have spent many years in study of Scripture. They provide us with excellent material that properly represents God’s message of the Bible. We can be confident, when using their material or that produced by people under their tutelage, that it is theologically accurate. Men and women from other denominations have also been blessed by God as they produce theologically accurate material and this is beneficial for our use.

Using material that contains errors, is weak or is flawed in its presentation can be dangerous. God has warned us in Romans 16:17 “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”

As we purchase Bible study material, we must be discerning of the content or we may inadvertently weaken our faith rather than strengthen it. Following are some points to be considered.

Negatives to watch for:

1. I pursue God and/or find him, rather than vice versa
2. Personal experience or opinion is the criterion for truth rather than Scripture alone
3. Living a perfect life is possible this side of glory
4. I can make myself worthy to God
5. I can find God aside from his written Word (e.g., intuition, experience, meditation)
6. I can find God through 10-step or other self-help plans popularly used to overcome bad habits
7. Manmade standards that burden the conscience
8. Scripture is reduced to a formula to secure earthly success, health, or happiness
9. The focus is on me and how I feel rather than on God and what he has done for me
10. God is limited to what I can understand or reason

Positives to look for:

1. Proper distinction between law and gospel, and inclusion of both
2. Justification is by grace—God alone declares us righteous and changes our status from condemned to acquitted; justification is complete and universal (available to everyone); justification is a free gift, given to us through faith
3. Sanctification (holy living) is possible only as a consequence of our justification
4. We are all sinful by nature and unable to reach out to God apart from the Holy Spirit
5. Grace is always the unmerited favor and forgiving love of God
6. Incarnation, redemption, forgiveness, and reconciliation are central to the message
7. Faith and the fruits of faith are created and maintained by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace (the Bible, Baptism and Holy Communion)
8. The relationship I have with God, through the merits of his Son, is the foundation for all other relationships

Through our study of God's Word, God changes our attitudes, ethics, relationships and even our character. With joy we read Romans 12:2 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Whenever and wherever the Word of the Lord is expressed and accurately reflected, we trust that the Holy Spirit will bless us.

Reference: Bivens, Forrest L, Using Devotional Classics. Available on the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary website at <http://www.wlsessays.net/node/2040>

Lesson 4: Personal Bible Study Worksheet Sample

Scripture passage:

Author and date:

Context notes (How do these help me understand the Scripture?):

- Historical setting
- Audience
- Location or setting

What is the main point of the section?

How do the verses before or after help me understand this verse?

What other Bible passages help me understand this verse—or what other passages are similar and supportive of this truth?

Where do I see the law or gospel in this section and what is it telling me?

Are there any key words or concepts that need to be emphasized or explained?

Additional notes:

Lesson 4: Logistical Planning Checklist

- How many women will you plan for? (How many books will you order, how many copies do you need, and how many chairs will be set up?)
- Who makes copies of the handouts?
- Do you want or need women to register? (Where or how?)
- If women invite others how will they share the details?
- Who will unlock the door and turn on the lights? (Then lock-up, etc.)
- Who else will be in the building? (Will the outside door be locked?)
- Does someone need to shovel the sidewalk? (And where is the shovel?)
- Will someone need to adjust the thermostat? (How do you do that?)
- Does someone need to make coffee and then clean the coffee pot? (Where are those supplies? Do you need to bring your own coffee/filters/k-cups?)
- Will there be snacks? (Who does that—and did they plan for dietary needs?) Some women use a “traveling plate” that someone takes home and brings back with treats. Then it goes home with someone else.
- Will there be tables to wipe down? (Just wiped or sanitized?)
- Will there be children who need day care or items to play with? (Who gets those and puts them away?)
- Will you need name tags? (Don’t forget a good marker or pen!)
- How will you get a list of the contact information for women who attend? (You’ll want this for changes due to emergencies or weather)
- What is the expectation for how tidy the room should be when you’re done? (Avoid frustration by making sure you know the answer to this.)

Lesson 5: Teaching Like Jesus by Donald W. Patterson

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Teaching Like Jesus

“No one ever spoke the way this man does” (John 7:46). That's what the temple guards said to the chief priests, when they had sent them to apprehend Jesus and they came back empty-handed. When Jesus finished his great Sermon on the Mount in Galilee, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, “because he taught them as one having authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Matthew 7:29). Jesus was the master teacher, hands down. What was it that gave him such power over his hearers? Well, first of all he was Jesus, God in the flesh. Of course he had power over people. His words were always the very words of God. But we can go further in discovering the power of his teaching than just pointing to his deity. In both content and style his words packed a punch for everyone who heard them every time he opened his mouth. Since we are “little Christs,” as Luther put it, we want to teach like Jesus. We want to teach like him because we want to save people through him. What was it about Jesus’ content and style that we can emulate in order to be the best stewards of our vocal cords?

Jesus Kept His Teaching Focused on Saving People

First of all, Jesus’ words were so powerful because they were aimed at the soul for its salvation. Even though many times people tried to deter him from speaking to their need for him and his salvation, he would always get back to that very point. So many people wanted Jesus to settle their personal disputes (Luke 12:13-21), their theological debates (John 4:1-26), or to satisfy their selfish desires (Mark 10:35-45). But he had one thing on his mind. He was on a mission to save their souls. So, when he taught publicly or privately, he kept himself from getting trapped into discussions about issues peripheral to this one question, “How is the soul saved for all eternity?”

Not one person was exempt from his attempt to call them to faith. Consider the following examples:

1. Jesus was at a well getting a drink of water in the heat of the day and a woman who “happened” to be there ended up hearing law and gospel even after she tried valiantly to keep the conversation off of herself and on theological disputes (John 4:1-26).
2. Pilate was trying to resolve the dilemma of what to do with Jesus. But instead of defending himself, Jesus opened the door to discuss saving truth with his statement, “I have come to bear witness to the truth.” Pilate slammed it closed with his retort, “What is truth?”
3. When Jesus cleansed the temple on Monday of Holy Week he did not do it just to fulfill the prophecy that he would have zeal for God's house but also to restore the court of the Gentiles to its rightful purpose of

providing the spiritual education of the Gentiles along with the Jews. He wanted the Gentiles to have the opportunity to be saved and the temple sales counters had taken that opportunity away (Isaiah 56:6,7 and Mark 11:12-18).

4. When the disciples rebuked people who were bringing little children to be touched by Jesus, he stopped them and said to let the children come. But instead of stopping there, he quickly used the children as an illustration for the disciples to show them that they could not enter heaven unless they trusted like a little child (Mark 10:13-16).
5. When Jesus healed the man lowered down through the roof he started by saying, "Your sins are forgiven," instead of, "Rise, take up your bed and walk," because he wanted everyone to know that he came to save us through forgiveness more than to heal us through miracles (Mark 2:1-12).
6. When a man interrupted Jesus to get him to settle his dispute with his brother over an inheritance, Jesus deflected his request for a judgment and then went on to warn against this kind of greed that would rob his soul of eternity (Luke 12).

While Pharisees were more worried about ceremonial uncleanness from mixing with the tax collectors and sinners, Jesus pointed out that he was spending time with them to save their souls through his righteousness (Matthew 9:9-13).

You can turn to any page in the gospels and you will find Jesus speaking the words that lead people to salvation. This is a compass for our teaching. We want to teach everything there is to know about the Bible and what it says about God's will for our lives. We want to teach about spiritual gifts, the Trinity, the prophecies in Revelation, and the ways we keep the Ten Commandments. Marriages are in shambles today. A ton of folks in our pews had poor role models of conflict resolution. Not many have a clue about a life of radical Christ-like stewardship of one's time of grace. So many Generation X'ers are seeking insights to repair their fractured relationships. But as loudly as these issues beg for our attention, we had better not ever be found teaching the word of God without leading souls back to their Savior in some way. The power is in the cross and so we must put every issue squarely at the foot of that sacred tree. There our people will be saved and there they will receive from the gospel the power to be sanctified. The power will come from the dynamo of their own justification.

In order to save our audience we simply must not shrink back from making our people wrestle with the uncompromising law of God. The Old Adam with his nine lives is sitting in the pew and standing in the pulpit every Sunday. The *opinio legis* says every Sunday, "Look I am here aren't I? I am not all that bad." Even we preachers easily fancy ourselves as not being like other sinners. Whether we want to admit it or not, ever since we have awakened this morning, we have battled thoughts of comparing ourselves to others and evaluating people and ourselves based on performance or perceived performance. We cannot get away from it. That's why we

need an honest soul-searching law to crush the pride in us and make us seek our Savior.¹ My father was never a pastor. But he loved the law and the gospel. He knew that it was what kept him saved. Once, when he and mom came to visit our service on a Sunday, he was so happy to hear how I preached law from Isaiah 6. But he wanted to make it a teaching tool for the rest of my sermons. I can still hear the sobriety in his quivering voice as he said, "We all come to church with different values for ourselves. Some come thinking they are really something because of how well things are going at work. Others feel good about their church life. But your job, Donald, is to make us all a zero. Then, after you have put us all on that same low level you can restore us to Christ and make us 100% in him." Uncompromising law, that's what it means to preach like Jesus. Remember how he told his brothers, "The world hates me because I testify that they are evil"? (John 7). Or consider him saying in the Sermon on the Mount, "If you give good gifts to your children even though you are evil..." (Matthew 7:11).

When we preach the law, we need to hit close to home just as he did. God save us from the generic piffle, "We are all sinners." Or "We sin in thought, word and deed." Or "All of us are condemned." Instead, we want to ask pointed questions, "Have you had any jealousy today? When someone else gets a good grade, is it hard to rejoice with him or her?" Or "This morning when you were at home, did you say anything to your mother or sister that Jesus would wince to hear? Should God let a person like you into heaven? Did you lie to anyone this week? Are you harboring any hatred toward someone at work? If an angel were to run to Jesus to tell what you said at school today, would you chase after him to beg him to let you take back what you had said?" Bring the people to the edge with the law and then comfort them with the gospel. Pray about it dear preachers. God will give you more examples of specific law. And don't forget to look for the law in the text. It is a misuse of God's Word to continually recite your favorite list of sins when the text has specific sins right in its borders.

Also, when preaching the law Jesus did not always shout. He did speak out boldly in Matthew 23, but most often the words themselves pierced into the division of soul and spirit without any help from the diaphragm. Most often when we raise our voices to preach law, we actually put a blunt end on the arrow.

¹ Jesus wasn't afraid to leave his listeners with only the law. If they needed to let the law finish its work, he left them with law. Look at Luke 10:25-37 or Luke 18:18-30. Have you ever taught the Parable of the Good Samaritan to teach us how to love others? That's not why Jesus told it. He told it to show one man that he didn't love others and therefore needed a Savior from his condemnation. He left that man with the law. "Do this and you will live."

Keep the words as sharp as a scalpel, not sarcastic, but penetrating and then carefully cut to the chase like the hands of a surgeon separating a tumor from life-giving brain tissue. Pierce with words, but don't beat over the head with volume. Then the folks will more easily see that you are saving them as you cut away the cancer rather than wondering why you are bruising them out of frustration. And while I am at it, get rid of that pulpit tone. Nothing will kill law and gospel more quickly than a sing-song, soft and loud, fast and slow rhythm.

It might be safe to say that we probably don't need as much help with preaching the law to our people as we do the gospel. After all, we are naturally familiar with the law. The gospel on other hand is that foreign word that even we must have preached back into our souls each dawn. Jesus' preaching of the gospel was pure, simple, and personal. When the law had done its work, he cleansed, restored, and purified with free forgiveness.

Jesus was always talking about believing in him personally (i.e., to trust in his person and work for their salvation). Consider how many times Jesus pointed to himself. In fact, if he were anyone but God, our Savior, he would drive us crazy with his seemingly egocentric claims. But since he was the One who had come to save us in living color, his claims were more than appropriate, and they serve as a guide to how we want to teach. Look at John 5:39,40. These experts in the law studied Scripture all the time because they thought they would learn how to be saved by keeping the word faithfully. Jesus said to them, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that *testify about me*, yet you refuse to come to *me* to have life." Here are some others, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). "Whoever believes in *him* will not perish" (John 3:16). "No one can come to the Father except through *me*" (John 14:6). You know that there are tons of examples.

For your preaching take careful note of this: we are not saved merely by careful articulation of an abstract doctrine of justification. We were saved by a person. He is called Jesus Christ, and what he actually did was live and die for us. That is personal and powerful. So, when we teach and preach, we want to talk about Jesus and his work not just about doctrine without practical application. When we pastors teach the catechism in 5th-8th grade and our new member classes we must be especially careful that we do not get so caught up in "right thinking" that Jesus becomes this cadaver that has all the right parts but is no longer alive and vibrant for the soul. Jesus told us to preach repentance and forgiveness in his name (Luke 24:47). We do that best when we tell them everything about him, about his life and what he did to save us and then call people to trade in their ugly lives for his forgiveness. When we tell them about Jesus we also want to tell the story as if we were there. That takes extra study and preparation. But our people's souls are worth it. People need to see that we personally believe in this Jesus that we are talking about. That means personal and passionate communication.

Now that I have written all this ink about always preaching to save souls you might argue that Jesus did not always talk directly about himself and his saving work. For instance, the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13 is about the Word of God and

the different kinds of reception it receives in human hearts. Or consider when he taught us to forgive each other 70 x 7 times (Matthew 18). That's not about salvation. That's about obedience.

Yes indeed, to teach like Jesus is to teach so that God's people grow in their sanctification too. Everything Jesus taught had to do with either our justification in him or our sanctification through and because of him. To say it more plainly: Jesus taught in order to save people or to make saved people more like him through his gospel. The two are never separate and they weren't separate in his teaching either.

Jesus taught to change lives. That's sanctification. The Parable of the Sower changes our lives when we read it. When you read about the three bad soils don't you ask yourself what you can do to avoid being those worthless soils? It leads us to look at our hearts and repent so that our hearts will be good soil, and bear more fruit.

The command to forgive our brother 70 x 7 times changes us too. In our flesh we want to put limits on our love for others. Jesus' love is limitless. And he demands that we love with his love, not with our own feeble love. We listen to the limitlessness of his love and forgiveness and we cry out, "Lord, help me do that!" He always answers that kind of prayer affirmatively.

The feeding of the five thousand teaches that Jesus will provide what we need. It teaches us to relax and trust him as Savior and as our daily provider. That's sanctification and justification all in one. The Parable of the Persistent Widow teaches us to trust God enough to pray to him for help instead of working out everything by ourselves in unbelief.

So, everything Jesus did or taught either leads to our salvation or to our sanctification, or both. It either saves us or changes us for the better, for greater service to his glory. What's the point? The point is that we want to have the same focus in our teaching. We want to teach in order to save people and change their lives with God's Word. We don't teach to make sure we are right and everyone else is wrong. We don't teach to change outward behavior without an inward change of attitude. We teach the word to make people quit trusting in themselves and to keep them trusting in their Lord Jesus for everything. So, as far as the content of our preaching and teaching goes, to teach like Jesus is to persistently and doggedly preach for the salvation and restoration of their souls and lives.

Jesus Used Simple and Powerful Techniques to Get the Point Across

While it was the content of his teaching that made it have power to save and to change lives, we cannot overlook his style. It was so perfect, so powerful, so penetrating! Jesus took the most profound truths and made them something a child could understand. In my years of ministry I have read many commentaries and articles that use words I have to look up in order to understand what the author is trying to say about Jesus. But I never have to look up any of Jesus' words. With rare exceptions he spoke in plain, simple terms. His original listeners could listen and learn and believe. We will want to follow his lead by teaching God's truth in plain, simple terms and not grand theological phrases. Simple, clear teaching is what God used for adults and children alike. It kept static out of their reception of the truth. We

want that same clear reception. One disclaimer: Jesus did say things at times that he knew would stump his listeners. He had his reasons. Sometimes it was to veil the truth from them. Sometimes it was to pique their interest. Sometimes it was to reveal to them the huge gaps in their thinking about him and true spiritual matters. But even when he was hard to understand it wasn't because the words he used were polysyllabic. His words were plain and simple but his concepts often took people to a whole new paradigm. Consider the words on the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." These words challenge the most Lutheran mind don't they?

Jesus Used Picture Language More Than Simple Facts

With his plain and simple words Jesus used picture language to efficiently get his message into human hearts. His use of picture language made the truth come alive in living color. Metaphors, parables, similes, and comparisons are all over the place in the gospels.

I paged through all four gospels and examined the pages where we see the words of Christ. Guess how many pages I found where he did *not* use some kind of concrete picture, metaphor, or simile to teach his truth? One. Only one page of all the gospels, and there aren't many of his words on that page! Our Lord was the master of picture language. By using pictures he made sure his teachings would live in the hearts and minds of his listeners forever. In fact, I would guess that I could reference any one of his parables right now and if you had ever heard it (even only once) you could tell me the basic story line of the parable and its meaning. That's amazing don't you think? This guy lived 2000 years ago and his stories are still memorable, meaningful, and life-changing today.

We must return to our reference materials over and over to remember and rehearse what we mean by our theological phrases. When we use them we often find ourselves explaining again and again what they mean to our people. They cannot remember them that easily. Our theological arguments are important tools especially when building up fortresses out of the truth to protect its integrity from false teachers. But let's not kid ourselves. Our people need to hear the simple, plain word of God 99 times out of 100, instead of a term we must explain.

Sometimes Jesus' parables and pictures stumped even his followers. They didn't always understand Jesus. Think of when he warned against the yeast of the Pharisees and his disciples thought he said this because they hadn't brought any bread. Or when he talked about living water at the well in Sychar and the Samaritan woman thought for a while that he was talking about H₂O. Or when his disciples asked, "What is the meaning of the Parable of the Weeds?" (Matthew 13) But even in the moments where Jesus stumped his listeners, he still was able to keep their interest and get them to remember the picture he was painting for them. He even made his enemies remember his words when they stoutly rejected him and his message.

Do you see the value of this for teachers of the Word? There is a very important insight and encouragement for you who are sent to teach Jesus' little lambs. When you are teaching, find ways to paint simple and clear pictures of the

truth you want to convey. Make God's Word as memorable as possible when you teach it. Sometimes you may feel your work is nonessential because it deals with the basics, the plain and simple. Oh, nothing is farther from the truth! The basic truths are exactly what your Lord taught people. When you are teaching the rudimentary teachings of our beloved faith in simple clear words and pictures, you are saving and preserving souls in the most powerful way, just the way Jesus did.

Another benefit for the kingdom when you use vivid pictures is that they echo through your listeners to those who will listen to them. People who remember your simple illustrations and pictures will someday tell them to their children in tender bedtime conversations and supper table devotions. They will be passed on from friend to friend and from generation to generation. I am still telling my children the stories my pastor and Sunday school teachers used 35 years ago. One in particular is about a little boy who made and lost his boat and then bought it back again at a store. Have you heard that one? I think my pastor got it from his pastor when he was a boy. It is still bouncing around teaching the concept of redemption after all these years.

Teaching With Parables and Stories

What is it about a story that is so much more powerful than simply telling the truth as a naked fact? First of all, the story relaxes the listener. Instead of working hard to grasp a concept the person simply follows the events and characters in the story. It is an easy and enjoyable way to learn.

Secondly, a story allows for the speaker to get behind the defenses of his listeners in order to drive a point home. If I came to you and said, "Gay people have feelings too and I want to tell you how to be sensitive to them," you would raise your defenses. You would immediately wonder if I was a flaming liberal trying to subvert God's Word and make you change your morals. But if I tell you about a guy who tried hard to change the way he was but just couldn't and I share with you his struggle and his feelings about his harsh father and prejudiced grandfather, before too long you are empathizing with him well enough, even though you don't approve of his self-chosen sexual orientation.²

² Hollywood has been using the power of story for decades, and by means of stories they have changed the moral fiber of our nation. In fact, some folks are even saying that the television show, "Commander in Chief," which features a woman president, is specifically intended to get Hillary Clinton elected in the next presidential race. Whether the accusation is true or not, it shows that people realize just how powerful telling stories really is. In Apache culture they have 31 stories that tell their legendary world view and religious roots. Telling stories has by itself preserved a segment of their culture true or imagined. The stories live on and on in the minds of Apaches and make them feel, well, like Apaches.

How is this insight about the power of story useful for the classroom? Well, for that student or member who dares you to teach him anything, telling stories can get behind his defenses and teach him without him being able to stop you. Some of you have people who have put a chip on their shoulder toward you. Stories help get behind their defenses. And the story helps them to forget you and listen to the things of God. The story pushes you aside although you are the one telling it.

Thirdly, stories allow the listener to feel what the speaker is talking about. They reach the heart and emotions at the same time that they reach the mind. The whole inner person is involved in learning and not just the intellect. Think of Jesus' three parables about lost and found things in Luke 15. Each one gets you in touch with anxieties you have had about the loss of important things or people in your life. And you can easily relate to the happiness of the ones who found what they had lost. Do you remember to whom Jesus told these three parables? He told them to the Pharisees who were highly critical of his outreach ministry to the dregs of society. Jesus got behind their defenses and helped them feel the urgency of finding and restoring lost treasures. The people Jesus was reaching were lost treasures to God, and Jesus wanted the Pharisees to see and feel this. That's why he told them these three parables. When they heard the three parables, they couldn't stop themselves from feeling and seeing what he wanted them to.

Fourthly, creatively telling a story engenders involuntary attention. People easily get bored and don't want to listen to us, especially in this television and video game age. But when they hear creativity they think, "Hey, this took time to think through. I am going to see what this is all about." Telling well-prepared stories unlocks some good vibes that make us want to listen.

Finally, stories allow you to take your listeners by the hand and lead them from where they are to the very place you want them to be. You are able to land them at the very spot you want them to land. Jesus did this in the parable of the Good Samaritan. By the end of that story you want to be a good neighbor to people. You feel guilty for all the times you haven't been a good neighbor too. You want forgiveness for that sin. The story accomplishes all that without anyone telling you it did.

At this point you might think, "I like the idea but I don't have any good stories. My life is boring. What can I share?" Well, you can borrow from anyone. When you hear a good story and can think of a verse it illustrates, jot it down in the margin of your Bible next to that verse. And jot down who first told the story too. (I even date it as to when I heard it.) Then when you teach that passage and tell that

story, just tell your audience that you heard this story and reference your source.³

But more importantly, I want you to challenge yourself to unlock that creative side in you and to make up some stories of your own. Tell lies? No, don't tell lies. Was Jesus lying when he told parables? No. He made it clear that he was telling fiction. If the Lord used fiction to convey truth, why can't we? But do not attempt it without training and direction. "Sponge Bob Square Pants" is a story told by people without training or direction.⁴ Entertaining with stories is not what we are talking about. Jeff Foxworthy entertains with stories.⁵ That's not what we are talking about either. There are lots of helps to guide and direct good story telling for illustrating God's word. In the appendix of this paper you will find some.

Jesus Used Metaphors and Similes

Jesus not only told stories to draw pictures of truth. He also drew small pictures in brief one-liners. He used metaphors and similes. For example, instead of simply telling the Pharisees that Herod was a deceptive man, he said, "You go tell that fox that on the third day I will reach my goal" (Luke 13:32).

Instead of simply telling his disciples that he loved to do his Father's work, he said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

Instead of just telling his disciples that they were the ones sent by God to influence the world, he said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13).

Instead of saying, "There is no way to please the Pharisees and Sadducees," Jesus said, "They are like children sitting in the market place complaining no matter what you do" (Paraphrase of Matthew 11:16).

Instead of just saying, "Put your trust in my teaching," he said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).

³ I just heard a great story to illustrate the thought in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "We have this treasure in jars of clay," from Rev. Mark Schroeder of LPS. He told the story about a picture he saw of a hurricane Katrina victim who was intently watching some rather inconspicuous burlap sacks in a ragged net dangling from a helicopter coming to her yard where her home lay destroyed. He asked us, "Do you think she cared more about the sacks or about the food that was inside that would keep her family alive?" He didn't have to answer it for us. That's the sign of a good story. I wrote a summary of his illustration in the margin of my Bible next to 2 Corinthians 4:7. Now this one is yours. Borrow it and use it to comfort people and to teach them to let Jesus' light shine out from them without regard for themselves.

⁴ Sponge Bob Square Pants is a popular kids' cartoon.

⁵ Jeff Foxworthy is a current popular comedian.

Do you feel how these metaphors and similes make the truth more palatable and more memorable? It makes you think of his words in terms of your five senses. You feel, taste, touch or hear something when you think of what he is saying.

To teach like Jesus, start trying to be more illustrative when you tell the main point of your lesson or sermon. Here is a metaphor for the thought, "Jesus forgives all of your sins." Say, "Jesus highlights every one of your sins on his computer screen and with the click of the delete button they are all erased forever, never to be recovered." All of us have marveled at how a large volume of information can be deleted in a split second from our computer. So, the illustration taps into our emotions and our sense of sight. The metaphorical presentation of the truth is more memorable than the plain sentence. The very best place for the metaphor is at the end of your lesson or any place where you are driving the main point home. A word of caution: be careful not to use so many metaphors for so many parts of your lesson that you are actually just displaying a penchant for metaphors and not well-planned teaching. It just takes practice to use metaphors and similes well. But diligence pays off. You will get better with time.

Jesus Used Arguments from the Lesser to the Greater

Sometimes in his teaching Jesus would refer to something in the lives of his listeners that he knew they could understand (the lesser) and relate that something to our relationship with God (the greater). Look at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. There Jesus is encouraging us to pray confidently because we can trust that God will give us what we ask for. After all, we are his children. He says, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11).

Did you notice that we are "the lesser" as sinful parents who love our children and that God is "the greater" as the perfect loving Father in heaven? The power in the illustration is in our deeply felt desire to be a blessing to our children. We know we have that desire even though we are sinful. By tapping into our deeply felt emotions Jesus supercharges his point and makes it download twice as fast into our long-term memory (notice my use of metaphor). We reason along with Jesus, "If God is perfect and we are his children, how much more then does he have that power to bless us? We are more confident to pray to him since we know he will answer." Jesus' argument from the lesser to the greater motivates us to trust more in God and pray more to him.⁶ It changes us for the better.

Using this teaching technique will be more challenging for us. We aren't used to finding arguments from the lesser to the greater. We will pray for God's help. Remember that he promises to answer our prayers. One example will suffice here.

⁶ In Matthew 6:26-30 there are two more examples of this technique.

Little kids know how to forgive, usually better than adults. But they often wonder if God really forgives them. You could teach your children with an argument from their lesser to God's greater. It might go like this, "Have you learned to forgive anyone of something he did to you? Did you love him so much that it made you find a way to forgive him? Well, God is perfect in his love for us. He loves us more than we will ever love anyone else. So, he has found a way in Jesus to forgive us because he loves us so much." They will understand your point.

Jesus Used Questions To Control and Guide the Conversation to a Proper Conclusion

Another technique Jesus used was questions. He would ask a question that piqued the listeners' interest. Then he would drive the point home with his answer. Consider when he was at the home of Simon the Pharisee. Simon was critical of Jesus for letting a prostitute touch him as she washed his feet with her hair. Jesus asked a question, "Two men owed another man some money. One owed 500 denarii and the other 50. He forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" (Paraphrase of Luke 7:42-44). Simon had to answer while Jesus controlled the conversation and taught him about grace and the response it provokes.

Whoever asks the questions controls the conversation.⁷ Jesus' enemies knew this and tried desperately to control him with questions. But he would refuse to answer bad questions. Instead he would use his own counter questions. He refused to answer the way the question was asked because if you ask the wrong question, you will get the wrong answer every time. Jesus knew this and so he turned the conversation back to the right question. Jesus' enemies would ask, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?" "Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?" By what

⁷ Reporters show us every day that the person asking the questions in a conversation gets to control the conversation and set up the limits and parameters for an answer. The question itself "boxes in" the responder. For example, Larry King recently asked a preacher named Joel Osteen on national television, "Do you really think that all those millions of Moslems who work hard, pray and love their families the way you do but do not believe in your God are going to hell just because they do not espouse your religion?" He boxed Joel in. If he answered, "Yes," he was not just stating a fact but was saying that he really believed something that Larry King insinuated was bigoted and crazy. He was also condemning people based on what he himself thought according to Larry. What if he said "No"? He would deny the faith. Joel lapsed in his faith and denied his Savior. He said that his dad had worked with many Moslems and found them to be honest and nice people. They were good folks and he felt he couldn't condemn them to hell. What Joel failed to see was the third choice when someone else is asking you the questions. The third choice is to ask or answer the question that should have been asked. Larry King should have asked, "What were Jesus' claims and what did he do to establish those claims as fact?" Joel could have asked, (without answering Larry's question) "As a Jew do you believe that people are sinners?" Then he could have asked, "Do you know why Jesus died on the cross?" He would therefore make Larry confess the gospel even if he didn't believe it himself. Then Joel could have boldly proclaimed, "God the Father sent Jesus so no one would have to go to hell. Those who trust in Jesus won't."

authority do you do these things (cleanse the temple)?" "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" All of these were wrong questions, and Jesus didn't bother to answer any of them directly. Instead, he gained control of the conversation by asking his own questions. For instance, when they asked him by what authority he cleansed the temple he told them, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" (Matthew 21:24,25). With his refusal to answer their question and his counter question, Jesus gained control of the conversation. He asked them a question that would reveal the political motives. They couldn't get him to answer without answering his question first and so they just let him have control. Once he had the control he told a parable of two sons, one who obeyed and one who didn't. With a question and a parable he called them to faith.

There is an insight here for our teaching. Often our students are asking questions but they are not asking the right questions. Every now and then a bold teenager will ask, "How far can we go on a date?" If you ever try to answer the question in the way it is asked, you will fall over yourself especially if your answer is challenged. It is better to answer with a question. In response ask, "First of all let me ask you a question. If Jesus were your date how far would you go?" Or "Describe the kind of physical contact that you believe would a) glorify God, b) show respect to your date, c) keep yourselves from being tempted by sexual thoughts, and d) show respect for your date's future spouse." See how the right question can be used to answer the wrong question.⁸

Jesus Lived With His Students

Jesus' teaching was powerful for his disciples for more reasons than just the words he used. A lot had to do with the way he lived. Jesus lived with his disciples in a selfless relationship. He loved them perfectly. They learned to trust him as their friend. Therefore their hearts were open to him. The truth is that one of the reasons we listen to Jesus so easily is that we know him as the One who graciously came to live with us and die for us right here in our world. Knowing he did and does spend time with us makes us want to listen to him. He gave his time so he has our hearts. It is an undeniable fact of human nature that if you selflessly spend time with people, they will respect you and appreciate what you have to say. It underscores a maxim for ministry, "*Whoever gives the time gets the heart.*"

What does that mean for our teaching? It means that we must live with our people. If our contact with the families in our congregations is only in the sanctuary, fellowship hall, or classroom, then we have diminished our ability to teach them.

⁸ Rev. Mark Paustian does this very effectively in his two books, *Prepared to Answer* and *More Prepared to Answer*. One should learn how to teach like Jesus by rereading his books every year. For an example see pages 44-50 of *Prepared to Answer*. (NPH 2005)

“Whoever gives the time gets the heart.” So here are some suggestions for living with your people. Go to some of the games the children of your congregation play at the local soccer fields on Saturday. Comment on their performance. Praise only, please. Be sad with them when they lose. Jump up and down and hug them when they win. Other thoughts: bring cookies to school for other staff members. Play golf and go fishing even if it is not your thing. Visit your members at their work for lunch. Phone them on their birthdays. Stop by their homes for no reason at all. Offer to give them a ride home once in a great while. Send a get-well card when they are absent from school for being sick. Find out how their vacation went. E-mail them a hello every now and then. Listen to their silly little stories about whatever. Play with the kids on the playground. Get dirty with them. Attend their city choir concert. Talk about their parents in glowing terms. What ideas can you come up with? Remember, whoever gives the time gets the heart.⁹

Finally, dear pastors and teachers, I leave you with a promise from Jesus. Remember the parable of the growing seed that Jesus taught us in Mark 4:26-29. Seeds planted today will sprout and grow in time.

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

You know the meaning of that parable and how it applies to your ministry. You are sowing seeds every time you step into your study, your pulpit, your Bible class, and your classroom. We don't have to see the results to know that Jesus' words are true. So, teach like he did. Do it faithfully and with all the creative force you can muster so that someday a rich harvest will be reaped in the lives of those that the Lord entrusts to you to nurture.

This thank-you letter written by a man to his childhood Lutheran elementary school teacher, illustrates the power of teaching like Jesus.

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I'm just writing to thank you for being noticeable throughout the years I was your student. I noticed that every morning when I arrived at school

⁹ Why do you think that television has had such an impact on our lives? It is because we have given it so much time in our lives. How do you think gangs succeed in getting kids to do terrible things for their acceptance? It is because they give the time. A district criminal judge in Austin, Texas, once said at a banquet, “In 20 years of sitting on the bench I have only seen 5 men that I believed were hardened, unreachable criminals. The rest just didn't have a dad.” See. Whoever gives the time gets the heart. Our teaching will have more power in the hearts of the people we live with.

your car was safely parked in the lot. It told me that my mind was valuable enough to you to be taught well. I noticed on Sunday morning that when you saw me, you walked in my direction to shake my hand and say, "Good morning." It told me I mattered to you as a person not just a student. I noticed when you arrived late to my basketball game and left early but still cheered when I scored that free throw. It told me that you cared about what was important to me. I noticed how the tears welled up in your eyes when you carefully told our class about your grandmother and the pie she made every year for your birthday. It told me you knew what love feels like. I noticed when you giggled right before you got onto Billy Thompson for sticking crayons in his ears. It told me that a sense of humor makes life a little easier to bear. I noticed when you were listening to the pastor in church that you nodded when he talked about Jesus. It told me your faith was in your heart and not just your head. I noticed when you cried at your father's funeral but smiled when you sang, "I know that my Redeemer lives." It told me you understood pain and how it could be mixed with true spiritual joy. I also noticed how you had a lump in your throat when you said good-bye to our class on the last day of school of the last year you had us. It taught me that Christ's love lasts for a lifetime.

Maybe you didn't notice that I was noticing you so much. Frankly, I didn't notice that either, not until now. Now that I am older I can see that the way you taught me, the way you lived in front of me and the way you loved me honestly and with forgiveness has been a major reason I am safely in Christian adulthood. I just want to say thanks for being so noticeable.

In Jesus,

Mark

Dear pastors and teachers, feed Jesus' little lambs and live noticeable lives of love in front of them.

To God Alone Be the Glory.

Appendix

Some guidelines for writing parables or using true stories to illustrate truth:

1. Know exactly what point you are trying to teach from a passage or passages. Lead to that one (not two) main points. Illustrate the most important point or the hardest point to understand. Do not illustrate a thought just because you like the illustration. Don't illustrate several different points of the text with several different stories.
2. Consider your audience. Use age and gender appropriate stories. Some stories are ageless and genderless. Some are not.

3. Keep the facts simple. Too much detail can confuse the mind of a listener. Try simple parables first and embellish more when you get better at "orchestrating" the facts.
4. Make the parable emotional in order reach the heart and the mind, not just the mind of the student. I once heard a saying about preaching that I use to help me be real. "A message prepared in the mind reaches a mind. A message prepared in the heart reaches a heart. And a message prepared in life reaches a life."
5. In your over-all teaching ministry, make sure that you often illustrate the gospel, not just the law. We easily come up with law parables and moralize. It is sometimes harder but much more productive to illustrate the gospel.
6. Try using one main character in your parable and help the student relate to that character so that your student will learn as the character learns the truth you are teaching.
7. Make sure all the details of the parable help the listener to better understand the final point of the story

Lesson 5: Prayers to Open Bible Study

Opening Prayer 1

Heavenly Father, as we gather together to study your Word, we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit to be with us. Clear our minds from the distractions and concerns of the day and open our hearts to receive the truth of your Word. Guide our study and discussions that we may grow closer to you and honor you in all we do and say. Strengthen our faith according to the promises in your Word and bind our hearts to one another in fellowship and love. May the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Opening Prayer 2

Lord Jesus, as we gather around your Word we pray that you would teach us as children learning from their dear Father. Remind us of the blessed waters of baptism which washed us clean and filled us with your Spirit. Give us faith to be child-like in accepting your truth with unquestioning hearts; but grow us into mature believers who love your Word and search its depths for your wisdom and love. Guide and direct our study that we may keep your truth pure and grow in the knowledge and grace of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Open with verses from Psalm 1 and the accompanying prayer

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.

Heavenly Father, you have promised your blessing as we study the Scriptures. Be with us as we gather to listen, learn, and grow in our faith. Guide us to delight in your Word and move us to meditate on it day and night. Feed our faith with a constant stream of your living water that we may be found strong and fruitful in the seasons of our life. Shield us from the influence of the wicked and those who mock you. Direct our path away from sin and destruction, and find us righteous in your eyes because of Christ our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Open with verses from Isaiah and the accompanying prayer

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:10-12)

Lord Jesus, as the rain and snow come from heaven to water the earth, you have given us your Word that we may grow in faith. Thank you for that precious gift; bless us as we gather to study it with thirsty hearts. As plants bud and flourish with your tender care, we know that our faith will grow and produce fruits because of your great mercy and love. We praise you because we know that your Word works among us with power and effectiveness. Help us to ever treasure and cherish it, knowing that it will not return to you empty but accomplish your purpose. Fill our hearts with joy through your Word and lead us in the peace of your forgiveness, which comes through Jesus our Savior. It is in his holy and precious name that we pray, Amen.

Glossary of Key Words

Absolution - the announcement after a confession of sins that God has forgiven our sins because Jesus died for them. Absolution may be spoken publicly in a worship service or privately to an individual.

Apologetics – The studies related to defending truth, which includes studies to speak clearly, answer questions and ask questions that confirm God’s truth.

Apologist – One who speaks in defense. A Christian apologist defends the truths of the Christian faith.

Apology – “Defense.” The Apology is a booklet written by Melancthon to defend the Augsburg Confession.

Apostle – “One who is sent.” This most commonly refers to the specific men in the New Testament church personally chosen and sent out by Christ to preach the gospel after the resurrection. The four characteristics of the apostles: Taught directly by Christ, eyewitness of the resurrection, appointed/sent by Christ to preach the gospel, the ability to perform signs and miracles.

Atonement - A payment offered to remove the guilt of sin so that God and sinful man are reconciled (set at one).

Attribute - A quality that is characteristic of a person.

Baptism - The sacrament in which water is used in the name of the triune God to bring us into the family of God.

Baptize - To use water by immersing, washing, pouring, or sprinkling.

Beatitudes - The blessings spoken by Jesus in Matthew 5:3-12

Bible - God's written Word; a collection of 66 books inspired by God.

Binding Key - The power and right given by Christ to his church to refuse to forgive the sins of those who are impenitent.

Catechism - A book of instruction in the form of questions and answers.

Christ – “Anointed;” the name of Jesus that refers to his office. In Hebrew the word for “the Anointed” is “Messiah.”

Christian -1. Belonging to Christ (adjective); 2. one who trusts in Christ alone for salvation (noun).

Church - 1. All those everywhere who believe in Jesus as the Savior (same as holy Christian church, invisible church, communion of saints); 2. a group of people who come together to hear the gospel (visible church, congregation, church body).

Civil Law - That portion of the law of Moses which governed the Israelites as a nation. Since the time of Christ, God no longer requires that his church keep this part of the law.

Confess - 1. To admit that one has sinned; 2. to tell what one believes.

Confession - 1. An admission of sin; 2. a statement of faith.

Confirmation - A ceremony following instruction in which Christians confess their faith and are acknowledged as sufficiently instructed to receive Holy Communion.

Congregation - A group of Christians who unite for the public worship of God.

Conscience - The voice God places in us that bears witness to his law.

Convert - To turn from unbelief to faith in Christ.

Covenant - A solemn agreement, especially one in which God promises to bless and save.

Creation - 1. The act of making; 2. that which is made.

Creed - A statement of what a person or group of people believes and teaches.

Devil - 1. The leader of the fallen angels and chief enemy of God. The devil's name is Satan. 2. any fallen angel. The devils are also called demons.

Disciple - One who follows in order to learn; frequently used of the twelve who followed Jesus most closely during his ministry. It can also be used of any Christian.

Divine Call - The call a person receives from a congregation or group of congregations to serve in the public ministry.

Doctrine - A teaching.

Justification - God's declaration that people are not guilty because Jesus has paid for their sins.

Justify - To declare not guilty. This word pictures a judge in a courtroom who tells a criminal that there is no longer any charge against him.

Kingdom of God - Christ's rule in the hearts of his believers through his word.

Law - 1. The commands which tell people what God wants them to do and not to do. 2. sometimes in the Bible the word "law" refers to God's word in general, even those parts that are not commands.

LORD - When this word appears in all capital letters, it stands for YAHWEH, the name of God which emphasizes his grace and faithfulness to his promises.

Means of Grace - The gospel in word and sacraments, by which God offers and gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Meditate - To think deeply.

Minister - "Servant"; especially someone called to serve people with the means of grace.

Ministry - The office or work of a minister (as in "public ministry"). This can also more broadly refer to the service (or "ministry") of a believer done as an act of faith (this service is commonly referred to as the "priesthood of believers).

Persevere - To continue in spite of difficulties.

Prayer - An act of worship in which we speak to God from our hearts.

Repentance - A "change of mind" about one's sin. The Bible uses the word "repentance" in two senses: 1. sorrow over sin and desire to stop sinning; 2. sorrow over sin and faith in the forgiveness of sins.

Sacraments - A sacred act which Christ established for his church, in which an earthly element is used together with God's Word, as a means of offering, giving and sealing to us the forgiveness of sins and thus also life and salvation.

Sanctification - The work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. For the two different ways in which the Bible uses the word, see *Sanctify*.

Sanctify - To make holy, used in two different ways in the Bible: 1. to call someone out of the unbelieving world to be holy by bringing that person to faith in Christ, enlightening him and keeping him in the faith (sanctify in the wider sense); 2. to lead a believer to hate sin and be eager to live a holy life filled with good works (sanctify in the narrow sense).