

2019–2021

Christian  Life

reSOURCEs

for Planning Programs



1 Chronicles 16:23–24a

Two years of monthly ideas :

*Icebreakers, Devotions, Bible Studies, Programs,
Mission Service Projects, and Mission Grant References*



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The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Welcome to the 2019–2021 *reSOURCEs for Planning Programs* Manual

Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations (1 Chronicles 16:23–24a).

One of our greatest joys as Lutheran Women in Mission is to proclaim the glory of our Triune God and to tell the truth that salvation is found only in Him. The purpose of the *reSOURCEs for Planning Programs* manual is to help you to do this with joy! Every Bible study, devotion, and sketch contained in this manual has been LCMS doctrinally reviewed so you can use them with confidence knowing that they truthfully proclaim God's Word. The materials in this manual have been designed to help you to reach "the woman in the pew" so that she can grow spiritually, serve others, joyfully join her LWML sisters in Christ, and spread the Word personally through mission projects supported by mites.

How You Can Use This Planner Effectively:

- Keep this manual in a three-ring binder; share it with the next leaders.
- Review the entire planner to become familiar with its contents.
- Use the resources during the month listed or when they best fit your program needs. These materials can be used in your local LWML group, zone, district meetings and gatherings.
- Choose all or part of a monthly suggestion, depending on your objectives and time available.
- Determine theme, target group, and objectives for your meeting or event.
- Use the meeting and event outlines and suggestions found on pages 00–00 to help you in your planning.
- Use the Response Card on page 00 to help you review and evaluate your event.
- Don't forget that trying something new can be a good thing!

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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:16–17).

Calendar and Themes for September 2019 – August 2021

The page numbers listed after the monthly theme correspond to the numbers found at the bottom of each page. If no Bible translation is indicated, the English Standard Version (ESV) was used.

Selection of the 2019–2021 LWML Mission Grants takes place at the 2019 LWML Convention. Please see the LWML website each month for the featured Mission Grant Project and resources.

SEPTEMBER 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Sketch – New

Mission Service Project

GRACE-FULL WOMEN

pp. 13–25

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

Showing Grace – In small groups of 3–5 women, take turns sharing with one another a positive quality about someone in your small group.

A Grace-Full Woman

Grace-Full Women

Coffee Shop Grace

Plan this month to do one or more specific acts of grace (e.g., create a card or gift to show appreciation for a friend, your boss, your pastor, or a home-bound member in your congregation; pay for the lunch of the person behind you in line; phone or visit someone who is recently widowed).

Mission Grant #, Resources

(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

OCTOBER 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

LOVING AND RESPECTING AUTHORITY

pp. 26–35

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

Influencers – Briefly tell about an authority in your life who has influenced your life positively, and how she or he did so.

Showing our Pastors and Church Workers Love and Respect Loving and Respecting Authority

Invite your pastor to your group meeting and recognize him for his service. Or, plan a Sunday morning reception to honor your pastor(s).

Mission Grant #, Resources

(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

NOVEMBER 2019

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

ALWAYS THANKFUL

pp. 36–49

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Thankful Notes – Briefly share something from the past week about which you are thankful.

Taking Time to Contem'Plate

Bible Study – New
Program – New
Mission Service Project
Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

**Always Thankful
Decorating the Mitten Tree**
Create Thanksgiving cards for veterans in your congregation.

DECEMBER 2019
Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Program Event – New
Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

A SWEET SEASON pp. 50–64
And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:20).
Christmas Sweets – What’s your favorite sweet treat to eat at Christmas?
A Sweet Season
The Sweet Gospel Message
Sweet Christmas
Collect new stuffed animals for a community Christmas gift ingathering. Include manger animals such as sheep, cows, donkeys, and camels in your collection.

JANUARY 2020
Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Responsive Reading – New
Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

BALANCING ACT pp. 65–78
So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).
Keeping Your Balance – Name one change you had to make to your calendar this week to balance your schedule.
Balancing Act
Balancing Life’s Challenges
Our God is a God of Life
Collect winter comfort foods with a balance of meat and vegetables (e.g., soup, stew, chili) to donate to a local food pantry.

FEBRUARY 2020
Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

MINING HIDDEN TALENTS pp. 79–88
As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace (1 Peter 4:10).
My HiddenTalent – Demonstrate or tell about a hidden talent that you have (e.g., making balloon animals, bake-off queen, playing the tuba).
Finding Hidden Talents
Mining Hidden Talents
Contact a local organization that serves individuals with special needs and ask about any particular needs they may have. Then select a project and fulfill it. Include a way to share the Gospel as a part of your plan (if it is allowed by the organization you are serving).

MARCH 2020

Theme Bible Verse
Icebreaker

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

WHAT AN OPPORTUNITY!

pp. 89–101

Serve the LORD with gladness! (Psalm 100:2a)

Lenten Service – Brainstorm new ways to serve the Lord during Lent, rather than giving up something. Then select an idea and do it!

What an Opportunity!**Making Lent an Opportunity**

Encourage mite giving this month with a creative challenge such as having participants place a dollar in their Mite Boxes for each piece of chocolate they eat or for each soda they drink.

APRIL 2020

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Program – New
Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

FROM EMPTY TO FULL

pp. 102–115

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3b)

Easter Joy – What is your favorite part of the Easter worship service?

We Are Full!**From Empty to Full****A Resurrection Parade**

Obtain permission and make plans to fill flower planters at a local nursing home or assisted living facility. As possible, involve residents in your project.

MAY 2020

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

HOW TO BE A NEW-MOM MENTOR

pp. 116–127

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11a)

Name Game – Share how you selected your child’s (children’s) names or the origin of your own name.

How To Be A New Mom Mentor**Mentoring New Moms**

Plan a spa day at your church to bless new moms. Pamper new moms with a foot soak in warm, sudsy water with bath salts, a manicure, and/or massage.

JUNE 2020

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

FINDING A LIFE-LONG MATE

pp. 128–136

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Ephesians 5:25, 28).

Mate Debate – What do you think is the most important quality or trait for a husband to have and why?

Faithful Mates

Bible Study – New
Mission Service Project

God's Purposes for Marriage

Invite a single woman in your congregation to lunch. Have a listening ear toward her concerns. Mentor and encourage her to take part in activities your group has planned, especially Bible study.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

JULY 2020
Theme Bible Verse

BUT, GOD, WHAT IF ... ? pp. 137–147
[Jesus said,] "Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34).

Icebreaker

Encouraging Words – Share a Bible passage that helps to calm and encourage you when you are anxious or troubled.

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Mission Service Project

Be Happy, Don't Worry
Encountering "What Ifs" on the Expressway of Life
Make refrigerator magnets featuring the Bible verses shared earlier in the Icebreaker. Encourage participants to share their magnet with someone facing a troubling or challenging situation.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

AUGUST 2020
Theme Bible Verse

BEING CONTENT AND SINGLE pp. 148–159
For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

Icebreaker

Alone Time – What is a favorite activity that you like to do when you have time to yourself?

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Mission Service Project

It Would Have Been Enough
Being Content and Single
Invite a single woman for coffee or brunch after a Sunday worship service. Talk together about her talents and strengths. Work with her to find a way to share her strengths and talents meaningfully with others as she serves the Lord.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

SEPTEMBER 2020
Theme Bible Verse

WORKING TOGETHER pp. 160–171
Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8).

Icebreaker

All Together Now – Divide into groups of three. In three minutes, name as many activities as possible where it is necessary to have more than one person involved to get the job done.

Devotion – New
Bible Study – New
Mission Service Project

Working Together in His Strength
Working Together
Plan a work day to help a local mission organization, school, or other Christian organization with a big project (e.g., painting, landscaping, remodeling). Invite people of all ages from your

congregation to join in the project.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

OCTOBER 2020

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Sketch – New

Mission Service Project

LORD, I CAN'T HANDLE THIS!

pp. 172–184

[Cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

Stressed Out—Not! – What is an effective way that you handle stress?

Be Still

Lord, I Can't Handle This!

Wearing the Armor of God—Really!

Organize a team of women from your congregation to assist a person currently living in a stressful situation with housework, meal preparation, childcare, transportation, and so on. People in need of such assistance might include a cancer patient, an older adult with no relatives in the area, a mom who cares for a child with a physical or developmental disability, or an individual recovering from surgery.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

NOVEMBER 2020

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

GOD, YOU WANT ME?

pp. 185–194

And I heard the voice of the LORD saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8)

Truth Tellers – Share a time when you followed the Lord's prompting to share the Gospel with someone. What happened?

God, You Want Me?

A Life-Long Mission Trip

Make plans with your group to go on a short mission trip. Go to www.lcms.org and click on "Serve" to find out about current mission service opportunities.

Mission Grant #, Resources
(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

DECEMBER 2020

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

THE RIGHT TIME

pp. 195–208

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4).

Perfect Timing – Share a situation when God's timing was different from your own.

Time Out

The Right Time

Contact a local foster care organization for needs and assemble care packages for children entering foster care.

Mission Grant #, Resources

www.lwml.org/mission-grants

JANUARY 2021

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

www.lwml.org/mission-grants

AFRAID OF WHAT?

pp. 209–218

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

Facing Fears – What is the most frightening experience you've ever faced?

Afraid of What?

Faith Over Fear

Make or purchase fleece blankets or small stuffed animals to donate to your local law enforcement agency, fire department, or social service agency to give to children for comfort in crisis situations such as car accidents, fires, or natural disasters.

FEBRUARY 2021

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

www.lwml.org/mission-grants

COMPASSIONATE CARING

pp. 219–232

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1–2).

Showing Christ's Compassion – Share a time when someone showed Jesus' compassion to you. How were you helped?

Compassionate Caring

How to Show Christ's Compassion To Those Who Face Chronic Conditions

Phil's Friends is a non-profit group that specializes in care for individuals fighting cancer. Go to <https://phil'sfriends.org/> for information on how your group can help with care packages and other needs. Or, contact a similar group in your area to volunteer.

MARCH 2021

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

Mission Grant #, Resources

www.lwml.org/mission-grants

JESUS' SERVANTS

pp. 233–244

... through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13b).

Define It – What does it mean to be a "servant?"

Jesus' Servants

God's True Desire For His Children

Host a foot washing Lenten event at your LWML meeting. Have each person bring her own dishpan. Have gentle body washes, washcloths, and hand towels available. Pair participants together. Have partners take turns washing and drying one another's feet. As the foot washing takes place, have a volunteer read out loud: John 13:1–17.

APRIL 2021

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

FROM GOOD TO BETTER TO BEST

pp. 245–254

*But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).***Always Easter** – What are some ways that we can celebrate Easter every day?**On Solid Ground: Living and Sharing Jesus' Easter Victory From Good to Better to Best**

Plan an Easter victory party for your congregation to be held two or three weeks after Easter. Read the Easter story from one of the Gospels. Sing Easter hymns. Make a craft featuring the message, “He Is Risen” as a take-home reminder for participants that every day we can rejoice in the salvation and eternal life Jesus has made possible for us.

Mission Grant #, Resources

www.lwml.org/mission-grants**MAY 2021**

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

RAISING CHRISTIAN CHILDREN

pp. 255–263

*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).***Training Ground** – Name a Sunday school or home devotional activity that made an impression on you as a child and now as an adult.**Raising Children Who Love Jesus****Raising Christian Children**

Invite the children of your congregation to a “May Basket” activity. Make cards that share the Gospel message. Place the cards into small baskets along with a potted garden or indoor plant. Have the children help you deliver these baskets to homebound members of your congregation.

Mission Grant #, Resources

www.lwml.org/mission-grants**JUNE 2021**

Theme Bible Verse

Icebreaker

Devotion – New

Bible Study – New

Mission Service Project

WOMEN AT WORK FOR THE LORD

pp. 264–273

*All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair (Exodus 35:26).***Gainfully Employed** – What was your first job?**Women at Work for the Lord****Sharing Our Gifts as We Work for the Lord**

Donate women's clothing suitable for job interviews to a local social service agency or women's shelter. Many women entering the workforce often do not have clothing that they can wear as they search for employment.

Mission Grant #, Resources

www.lwml.org/mission-grants**JULY 2021**

Theme Bible Verse

WHY, GOD?

pp. 274–284

[Joseph said,]“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20a).

Icebreaker	Asking Why? – Have you ever asked “Why God?” If you feel comfortable, share about the situation that prompted the question.
Devotion – New	God’s Goodness
Bible Study – New	“Why God?” Trusting in God’s Goodness In Times of Disappointment and Anger
Mission Service Project	Contact the Activity Director of an Alzheimer’s unit in a local nursing care facility or hospital and make plans to assist with an activity for the residents.
Mission Grant #, Resources	(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)

AUGUST 2021	STEADY SHOULDERS pp. 285–298
Theme Bible Verse	<i>Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ</i> (Galatians 6:2).
Icebreaker	Steady Shoulders – Share a time when the steady shoulders of another person helped you through a difficult situation.
Devotion – New	Bearing One Another’s Burdens
Bible Study – New	The Loss of a Child
Mission Service Project	Create comfort kits to share with mothers who have experienced the death of a child through miscarriage or through complications after birth. These kits can include decorated cards with comforting Bible passages, a soothing lotion or candle for mom, a journal, and a donation in the child’s memory to an organization of the parents’ choice.
Mission Grant #, Resources	(www.lwml.org/mission-grants)



A Grace-Full Woman

Devotion

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).*

Being graceful doesn't come naturally to me. I'm the one who prefers shoes without heels, because honestly, I don't trust myself not to twist an ankle while wearing them. Dancing, and particularly line-dancing, doesn't come easily for me either. Although I can usually pick up the rhythm, the quick steps required to stay with the group make me feel clumsy and inept. Needless to say, the art of being a ballet dancer was never on my radar.

Being a grace-full woman doesn't come naturally to me, either. I am reminded in Romans 3:23 that ... *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. I am sinful and thus an enemy of God. I deserve only God's wrath and condemnation. I am separated from Him by an insurmountable wall of my sin, built daily – brick by brick, sin by sin.

... *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). What Good News! God saw my wretched state and sent His Son Jesus to be born, live a perfect life, suffer and die as a result of *my* sins, and then rise to glorious new life, conquering sin, death, and the devil. I can wear Christ's robe of righteousness because of God's grace – His undeserved love – for me by faith in Jesus. That faith, too, is a result of grace through the Spirit, since it is not natural for me. I am literally **full** of God's grace in Jesus and altogether forgiven and lovely in His sight.

The Spirit working in me enables me to share this grace with others in my life. I'm filled with an overflowing grace that simply spills over into the relationships I have with those around me. What does that grace look like? As the words of Ephesians remind us, it is kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving. It is a "new natural" in Christ Jesus. This grace loves, serves, and has compassion for others. This Spirit-filled grace looks for ways to bring the Good News of salvation through Jesus to a world that desperately needs to hear it as it stumbles around in sin and darkness. Do you know someone who is groping in the darkness of sin who needs to hear today about God's grace in Jesus?

Being a graceful person doesn't come naturally for me. Perhaps not for you, either. But praise be to God that He has made me *His* grace-full woman through the merits of my Savior. I don't deserve it and in fact, sometimes I still stumble and fall, but His nail-scarred hands, through His gift of faith, are there to lift me up, forgive me, and set me on the right path. I can look forward with hope to an eternity in heaven with Him. What more can I do than to thank, praise, and serve Him – grace-fully!

Closing Prayer: Dear Gracious Father, thank You for Your gifts of salvation and faith in our Savior Jesus. Thank You for giving us Your undeserved love. Help us to share Your love through kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Make us Spirit-filled and bold witnesses to the Good News of salvation in Jesus to a world that desperately needs to hear. Make us Your grace-full people as we look forward in hope to eternal life with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

A Blessing from 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

A Grace-Full Woman
Written by Shari Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Grace-Full Women Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this Bible study, Bibles, hymnals]

Opening Prayer: Thank You, heavenly Father, for this opportunity to come together to study Your Word. As we contemplate Your will for us on our walk with You, lead us to see that Jesus' death and resurrection and Your grace for us through faith in You have freed us to live always and only for You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Take a moment to imagine you are pursuing the true path God desires you to follow. You are walking with God, step-by-step, as you glorify His name in word and action. You live every day with purpose and passion. Along the way you know God is saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

How's that going for you? Are you following God's will for you right now? _____

What do you think God is leading you to do in His service? _____

What obstacle(s) in your life are preventing you from following God's will for you? Is it a person? A general distraction? A worldly limitation like money or time? Is it something that you are waiting to pass through like a phase of life? Or ... _____

We often focus on what needs to change so that the time is right (in our own opinions) to follow where God is leading us. We may wait for our relationships to be fulfilling so that we are happy. We might play the part of grieving victims: that person won't stop behaving irresponsibly; the company for which you work isn't where it should be and you aren't getting the respect, freedom, or autonomy you have earned. We may feel that the world just can't seem to get its act together long enough for us to do the glorious work God has destined us to do. Sisters, attitudes and thoughts like these imprison us, and God has already set us free!

Let's pause for a moment and look at what Martin Luther faced in 1517. Three of the obstacles Luther faced in his walk with God were the **church**, the **traditions** of the times, and the **common language** of the majority of the other people who lived then.

1. The Church

In the **church** of Luther's time, the authority of broken people was taken as the authority of God. The church authorities neglected the Word of God and replaced its truths with their own falsehoods.

2. The Tradition

The **tradition** in Luther's day could be described as, "what was done had always been done, so it will be done forever." Or, "we've always done it this way, why change it now?" Those who thought otherwise were considered unwanted radicals.

3. The Common Language

The **common language** of many Christians in Luther's time was your actions add to or subtract from your eternal happiness. Misguided Christians believed that it was what you said and did that got you to heaven.

We are blessed that God worked through Martin Luther and led him to understand what is really true: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Ephesians 2:8–9). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Martin Luther saw that God was good and full of grace. God gave Luther saving faith in the truth of Christ Jesus so he did not allow the world and its sinful inhabitants to limit the work God led him to do.

Think back to the obstacle or obstacles you listed earlier that you feel stand in your way from doing what God desires you to do. Is your obstacle like number one above? Is the authority of a broken person (you or someone else) or a broken organization deciding your success in following God's plan for you? Or is it like number two? Is the way things have been done for however many years is preventing your progress, understanding, and forward movement? Is something that used to glorify God lost its meaning or purpose? Perhaps your obstacle is number three. Words, actions, and thoughts matter and can quickly become habitual. Do you see a pattern that is limiting you or affecting you in a negative way? Has the devil twisted your understanding of the Gospel so that you believe good works equal rewards? Circle the one of Luther's obstacles that is the most fitting to your situation.

While we know that God's grace for us through faith in Christ Jesus is all that is needed for salvation, we still may allow the devil to imprison us in obstacles which we believe prevent us from following God and from doing the work He desires us to do for Him and for others. In the Bible, God tells us of His abundant grace for us and how He has freed us to live our lives for Him as "grace-full women".

Read Titus 2:11. Then complete the following statement: God's GRACE is a gift for _____.

God's plan of salvation is for ALL people, no matter their race, background, or nationality. Read: Luke 10:25–37. It is likely that the Samaritan in Jesus' parable represents Himself (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH ©2009, study note on Luke 10:37, page 1735). How do the actions of the Samaritan mirror Christ's grace-full actions toward us?

Read Ephesians 2:8. Complete this statement: God's GRACE is a gift for _____.

God has given this gift not just for a blanket "everyone." He has given His gift of grace through faith in Christ Jesus personally to you. Through God's Word, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit works in every believer the knowledge that God's grace is a beautiful gift. To know God's grace is to know that you have truly been forgiven for your sins. To know God's grace is to recognize that God had you in mind when He first promised a Savior in the Garden of Eden to rescue Adam and Eve and all people from eternal death (Genesis 3:15).

To know God's grace is to know He loves you unconditionally. God never forces you to return His affections. Instead, He calls after you relentlessly to know His love for you as He shows His love for you.

God knows how many hairs you have on your head. He knows your smile. He knows your strengths and your insecurities. Read Ephesians 2:10. What else does God know for you?

How might the words of Ephesians 2:10 give you comfort when you are faced with distractions that try to prevent you from following God's will for your life? _____

Read Ephesians 4:32. Complete this sentence: God's GRACE is for you to _____. When we are confident and comfortable in God's arms as His loved and forgiven children, we are enabled by Him to love and forgive others. Through faith, as we trust in God who walks with us everywhere, we can grace-fully do the work that He gives us to do for Him.

Because of the work of Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, sin has no power over us. Through Christ, we are freed from the brokenness, burdens, and distractions caused by sin. Because of Jesus, we are grace-full women who are free to follow God and to show others the same grace-full love God shows us as we follow His will for our lives.

Read Ephesians 5:2. Why can we *walk in love* the path on which God leads us? _____

What does this mean for you as a grace-full woman? _____

Sing: "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow," LSB 805

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for daily reminding us of Your love and grace through Your Word, the Sacraments, and through Your daily actions of care and protection in our lives. Forgive us for our lack of faith in Your grace. Help us to live as Your grace-full women, free in You from the limits of the world, from sin, and from the brokenness of people. Thank You for sending us into the world to share Your love and grace with others. Lead us to show Your love and grace to all as we walk with You on the path You have prepared for us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Grace-Full Women
Written by Kristina Long, DCE Pocatello, Idaho
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League 2019



Grace-Full Women

Bible Study

Leader's Guide

[Please provide: copies of this Bible study, Bibles, hymnals]

Opening Prayer: Thank You, heavenly Father, for this opportunity to come together to study Your Word. As we contemplate Your will for us on our walk with You, lead us to see that Jesus' death and resurrection and Your grace for us through faith in You have freed us to live always and only for You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Take a moment to imagine you are pursuing the true path God desires you to follow. You are walking with God, step-by-step, as you glorify-His name in word and action. You live every day with purpose and passion. Along the way you know God is saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

How's that going for you? Are you following God's will for you right now? Encourage participants to share their responses.

What do you think God is leading you to do in His service? Encourage participants to share their responses.

What obstacle(s) in your life are preventing you from following God's will for you? Is it a person? A general distraction? A worldly limitation like money or time? Is it something that you are waiting to pass through like a phase of life? Or ... Encourage participants to share their responses. Emphasize that God desires us to serve Him in whatever our vocation may be. An individual might not need to change all that she is doing, but instead, she may need to examine the manner and focus with which her work is being done.

We often focus on what needs to change so that the time is right (in our own opinions) to follow where God is leading us. We may wait for our relationships to be fulfilling so that we are happy. We might play the part of grievous victims: that person won't stop behaving irresponsibly; the company for which you work isn't where it should be and you aren't getting the respect, freedom, or autonomy you have earned. We may feel that the world just can't seem to get its act together long enough for us to do the glorious work God has destined us to do. Sisters, attitudes and thoughts like these imprison us, and God has already set us free!

Let's pause for a moment and look at what Martin Luther faced in 1517. Three of the obstacles Luther faced in his walk with God were the **church**, the **traditions** of the times, and the **common language** of the majority of the other people who lived then.

1. The Church

In the **church** of Luther's time, the authority of broken people was taken as the authority of God. The church authorities neglected the Word of God and replaced its truths with their own falsehoods.

2. The Tradition

The **tradition** in Luther's day could be described as, "what was done had always been done, so it will be done forever." Or, "we've always done it this way, why change it now?" Those who thought otherwise were considered unwanted radicals.

3. The Common Language

The **common language** of many Christians in Luther's time was your actions add to or subtract from your eternal happiness. Misguided Christians believed that it was what you said and did that got you to heaven.

We are blessed that God worked through Martin Luther and led him to understand what is really true: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Ephesians 2:8–9). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Martin Luther saw that God was good and full of grace. God gave Luther saving faith in the truth of Christ Jesus so he did not allow the world and its sinful inhabitants to limit the work God led him to do.

Think back to the obstacle or obstacles you listed earlier that you feel stand in your way from doing what God desires you to do. Is your obstacle like number one above? Is the authority of a broken person (you or someone else) or a broken organization deciding your success in following God's plan for you? Or is it like number two? Is the way things have been done for however many years is preventing your progress, understanding, and forward movement? Is something that used to glorify God lost its meaning or purpose? Perhaps your obstacle is number three. Words, actions, and thoughts matter and can quickly become habitual. Do you see a pattern that is limiting you or affecting you in a negative way? Has the devil twisted your understanding of the Gospel so that you believe good works equal-rewards? Circle the one of Luther's obstacles that is the most fitting to your situation. Tally participants' responses and note if Obstacle 1, 2, or 3 is most prevalent.

While we know that God's grace for us through faith in Christ Jesus is all that is needed for salvation, we still may allow the devil to imprison us in obstacles which we believe prevent us from following God and from doing the work He desires us to do for Him and for others. In the Bible, God tells us of His abundant grace for us and how He has freed us to live our lives for Him as "grace-full women".

Read Titus 2:11. Then complete the following statement: God's GRACE is a gift for all people.

God's plan of salvation is for ALL people, no matter their race, background, or nationality. Read: Luke 10:25–37. It is likely that the Samaritan in Jesus' parable represents Himself (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH ©2009, study note on Luke 10:37, page 1735). How do the actions of the Samaritan mirror Christ's grace-full actions toward us?

Jesus came to serve and to save all people. Jesus pours out His grace and His healing help on all our ills and sins.

Read Ephesians 2:8. Complete this statement: God's GRACE is a gift for you.

God has given this gift not just for a blanket "everyone." He has given His gift of grace through faith in Christ Jesus personally to you. Through God's Word, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit works in every believer the knowledge that God's grace is a beautiful gift. To know God's grace is to know that you have truly been forgiven for your sins. To know God's grace is to recognize that God had you in mind when He first promised a Savior in the Garden of Eden to rescue Adam and Eve and all people from eternal death (Genesis 3:15).

To know God's grace is to know He loves you unconditionally. God never forces you to return His affections. Instead, He calls after you relentlessly to know His love for you as He shows His love for you.

God knows how many hairs you have on your head. He knows your smile. He knows your strengths and your insecurities. Read Ephesians 2:10. What else does God know for you? God knows the works He has planned for us to do.

How might the words of Ephesians 2:10 give you comfort when you are faced with distractions that try to prevent you from following God's will for your life? God will work through any obstacle and will help us to accomplish what His good and perfect will is for us.

Read Ephesians 4:32. Complete this sentence: God's GRACE is for you to share with others. When we are confident and comfortable in God's arms as His loved and forgiven children, we are enabled by Him to love and forgive others. Through faith, as we trust in God who walks with us everywhere, we can grace-fully do the work that He gives us to do for Him.

Because of the work of Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, sin has no power over us. Through Christ, we are freed from the brokenness, burdens, and distractions caused by sin. Because of Jesus, we are grace-full women who are free to follow God and to show others the same grace-full love God shows us as we follow His will for our lives.

Read Ephesians 5:2. Why can we *walk in love* the path on which God leads us? We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has freed us from sin, death, the devil, and any obstacle that threatens to entangle us and keep us from fulfilling God's will for us. We are commanded by Jesus Himself to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39b). The Holy Spirit works in us to lead us to show others the same self-sacrificing love that Jesus shows us.

What does this mean for you as a grace-full woman? Created by God to do good works, freed by Jesus from sin, death, and the devil, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can joyfully show God's love and grace to all.

Sing: "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow," LSB 805

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for daily reminding us of Your love and grace through Your Word, the Sacraments, and through Your daily actions of care and protection in our lives. Forgive us for our lack of faith in Your grace. Help us to live as Your grace-full women, free in You from the limits of the world, from sin, and from the brokenness of people. Thank You for sending us into the world to share Your love and grace with others. Lead us to show Your love and grace to all as we walk with You on the path You have prepared for us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Grace-Full Women
Leader's Guide
Written by Kristina Long, DCE Pocatello, Idaho
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League 2019



Coffee Shop Grace Sketch

[Please provide: 12 women of various ages to participate in the sketch, 12 copies of this sketch (one for each actress), 10 Bibles, 10 disposable coffee cups with lids, 2 tea bags, poster board sign that says “Holy Grounds Coffee Shop,” masking tape, two long tables, 10 chairs, two chef aprons for “baristas”]

[Before presenting: Set up one long table in front of a wall in the center of the stage area. This table will serve as the “counter” in the sketch. Tape the “Holy Grounds Coffee Shop” sign on the wall behind the table. Set the coffee cups and lids and the two tea bags on the table. Set up the other long table at an angle on the left-hand side of the counter table. Set 10 chairs around this table. Give each actress a copy of this sketch. Have the baristas put on the chef aprons. Give each of the Bible study women a Bible to carry.

Setting: Holy Grounds Coffee Shop. Ten women arrive at the coffee shop in four small groups carrying Bibles, ready to gather for Bible study. As each small group enters to order coffee, they talk with one another. Two baristas stand next to one another behind the counter ready to take each customer’s coffee orders

Barista 1: [To audience] Welcome, everyone, to the Holy Grounds Coffee Shop.

Barista 2: [To audience] Our coffee shop has an interesting motto: *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each person.* This Bible verse, from Colossians 4:6, reminds us to show God’s grace, mercy, and love to everyone.

Barista 1: [To audience] Many of our customers use our shop to gather for Bible study and fellowship. [Shades eyes with hand and looks out toward where the customers will enter.] It looks like one of our groups is about to arrive. [Baristas 1 and 2 turn their attention toward Women 1, 2, 3 as they enter the coffee shop.]

Group One (Women 1, 2, and 3) enter the coffee shop. They chat with one another as they walk to the counter.

Woman 1: [Enthusiastically] I am so excited to dive into our Bible study, “Grace Above All.”

Woman 2: I know! It is always fun to have a reason to get together with friends and Bible study is one of the best reasons.

Woman 1: I love that this study emphasizes not only the grace and forgiveness we receive from God for Jesus’ sake, but it gives us ways that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can share God’s grace and forgiveness with others.

Woman 3: And any day I get to have the official beverage of the LCMS with my friends is a good day! [Pauses briefly, then continues.] I was so sad to hear of the passing of Mr.

Lehman. How did the funeral go? Did you have enough desserts?

Woman 2: It was a beautiful funeral service. In his sermon, Pastor Smith did a wonderful job of sharing the sure and certain hope of eternal life we have through faith in Christ Jesus. Pastor reminded us that as a member of God's family of believers from the time he was baptized, God worked through Mr. Lehman to show the love and grace of Jesus to his family, friends, and co-workers. And yes, we did have plenty of desserts. [Pauses slightly.] But there was one thing. Mrs. Colby offered to bring a cake and she brought one from the grocery store. Can you believe it?

Woman 1: Really? Doesn't she know she's supposed to bring a homemade cake?

Woman 2: Obviously not.

Woman 3: Why is that a problem? Does it matter where the cake comes from?

Woman 2: Of course it matters. It is just lazy to go and buy a cake at the store.

Woman 3: But Mrs. Colby is a busy mom with three kids and her husband travels a lot. All of her kids are active in church and sports. Her donation should be appreciated. [Opens her Bible and flips into the New Testament.] God's Word says here in Colossians 3:23: *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.* She is serving the Lord no matter what kind of cake she brings. Through her donation, she shared Jesus' love with Mr. Lehman's family. She followed our Lord's example of caring for those in need.

Woman 1: [Thoughtfully taps her index finger on her forehead.] I guess I forgot how busy working moms are. I'm sorry I criticized her.

Woman 2: [Nods in agreement.] And our grocery store bakery does make a really good cake.

Group One turns their attention to the baristas behind the counter. The two baristas pantomime taking their orders and pouring the coffee into the disposable cups. After they receive their coffee cups, Group One moves over to the table to the left and sits down at the table as Women 4 and 5 (Group Two) walk in. The group members wave to one another as Group Two walks up to the counter.

Woman 4: Oh! I see some people from our group are already here. [Waves again at Group One.]

Woman 5: [Enthusiastically] Yes, I see that! [Speaks quietly.] It's a pleasure to come and have Bible study where there's no little kids around. Do you remember that noisy little boy in church last Sunday? His parents took him out of the sanctuary three times. The last time he was whining and complaining the entire way out. It was all so distracting!

Woman 4: [Thoughtfully] I remember having young kids at church. It was never easy. I admire those parents for bringing their kids to worship every week.

Woman 5: Well, my kids never behaved like that during worship.

Woman 4: [Sarcastically] Really? You know, you sound like the disciples when the people brought children to Jesus so He could bless them. [Opens her Bible and flips into the New Testament.] Here is the account of it in Mark 10. The disciples were telling those people

who were bringing their children to Jesus not to bother Him. But this made Jesus mad. Our Lord said, *“Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God”* (Mark 10:14). Jesus came for all people, young and old. He died and rose for all people, young and old. He loves everyone. Young parents need our support and love so they will continue to bring their children to worship so they can hear the word of God. God’s grace and love in our hearts helps us to welcome the little children just like our Lord Jesus did. [Pauses briefly, then continues.] I seem to recall when your kids were younger. [Chuckles] They were far from angels!

Woman 5: [Ponders what Woman 4 just said.] True, my children had their bad days too. I’m certainly glad that no one complained to me about them. I might have stopped coming to church with them. I’ll ask for God’s help to be more encouraging to all the young parents in our congregation. I’ll also ask for His help to be thankful that they and their children are there.

Group Two turns their attention to the baristas behind the counter. The two baristas pantomime taking their orders and pouring the coffee into the disposable cups. After they receive their coffee cups, Group Two moves over to the table and sits down with Group One. Group Three (Women 6 and 7) enter and wave to Groups One and Two while they walk up to the counter.

Woman 6: [Sniffs the air and smiles.] Ah, the sweet and tantalizing smell of coffee. A cup of coffee is the perfect way to start my day and get me motivated for our Bible study.

Woman 7: [Nods in agreement.] I know! Lutherans do love a strong cup of coffee.

Woman 6: True. Do you know who else could use a strong cup of coffee on Sunday mornings? The organist!

Woman 7: [Chuckles slightly, then becomes serious.] I think she does a wonderful job.

Woman 6: She does play well, but if she could only play those songs a little faster, that would be great. She seems to play every song at the same tempo: turtle.

Woman 7: I don't think "turtle" is an official music tempo. Let's appreciate her hard work and how she shares the talents God has given her to praise Him. She spends hours preparing and practicing every week. [Opens her Bible and flips to the New Testament.] When I read Ephesians 5:18b–20, I think of our organist: *but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* She really does make music from her heart. Every time she plays, she expresses her love for Jesus and her thankfulness to Him for rescuing her from sin, death, and the devil when He died on the cross and rose again.

Woman 6: You know, you’re right. Our organist does use her talents to give glory to God. [Sighs and bows her head.] I need to ask God for help to have a more grace-filled attitude toward everyone. He shows His grace for me every day through His love and forgiveness for Jesus’ sake.

Group Three turns their attention to the baristas behind the counter. The two baristas pantomime taking their orders and pouring the coffee into the disposable cups. After they receive their coffee cups, Group Three moves over to the left hand side and sits down with Groups One and Two at the table. Group Four (Women 8 and 9) enter and wave to Groups One, Two, and Three while they walk up to the counter.

Woman 8: [Looks quizzically at the wall where the coffee shop poster is displayed.] What to order, what to order? You know, I think I'll change it up a bit today and order a cup of tea.

Woman 9: That sounds good to me, too. Is Molly going to join us?

Woman 8: I'm not sure. I invited her. Did you?

Woman 9: No. Why should I bother? Whenever I invite her to anything, she never shows up. I've invited her to our local group meetings, zone rallies, and the kitchen clean-up day. I'm surprised when she shows up to church on Sunday.

Woman 8: [Kindly] Well, we don't know why she doesn't come to any of those events. But let's keep on inviting and encouraging her. God never stops reaching out to us with His grace and mercy. He encourages us to do the same.

Woman 9: Oh, that's right, Hebrews 10:24–25. [Flips open her Bible to the New Testament.] *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* These words remind me to ask the Holy Spirit for His help to be an encourager to others, just as He encourages me. [Pauses slightly.] Maybe we should try inviting her to a different activity.

Woman 8: How about our blanket tying event for the homeless shelter that's coming up?

Woman 9: That is a great idea!

Group Four turns their attention to the baristas behind the counter. The two baristas pantomime taking their orders and placing a tea bag into two of the disposable cups. After they receive their cups of tea, Group Four moves over to the table and sits down with Groups One, Two, and Three. Woman 10 enters in a hurry and waves to Groups One, Two, Three, and Four as she walks up to the counter. She quickly orders a coffee. The barista hands her a cup. Woman 10 walks over to the table and takes the last seat.

Woman 10: [Hurriedly] Ladies, thanks for waiting for me. I know I am always running a little late. Your patience is so appreciated.

Woman 6: We all run behind from time to time. We are just glad you could make it.

Woman 1: Now that we are all here, let's get started. Let's begin by reading out loud Ephesians 2:4–10. These verses remind us of the wonderful grace that God shows us every day. [All women open their Bibles and together read out loud.]

All Bible study women: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with*

him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Barista 1: [Looks over at the table of women.] That Bible verse is so important.

Barista 2: I know. [Thinks for a moment.] Grace—that's **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. G-R-A-C-E. All those wonderful gifts that God daily gives us, His forgiveness, faith in Him, a new eternal life and so many more, are ours because of what Jesus, our Savior did for us when He died and rose.

Barista 1: Maybe next week we could ask them to sit a bit closer to the counter. I would love to hear their Bible study.

Barista 2: I like that idea. If you want, go join them for a while right now.

Barista 1: Thanks. I think I will. [Walks over to the Bible study group as the Barista 2 pantomimes wiping off the counter.]

Barista 2: [Turns toward audience.] Perhaps you've heard similar comments to those made by the women in this sketch in your own conversations. Or, perhaps you've made some of those comments yourself. As sinful people, we may judge others. We may forget to think about the personal circumstances of others and what they may face. Just as in this sketch, in those times the Word of God reminds us to use *gracious speech*. As Ephesians 2:8–10 says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we always remember the grace we have because of Jesus. May our speech and thoughts be grace-filled, to the honor and glory of God.

Coffee Shop Grace

Written by: Rev. Matthew Lehman, Tracy Eickhoff, and Kelli LaVoie, Minnesota South District
Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Showing Our Pastors and Church Workers Love and Respect

Devotion

We ask you brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a).

“There goes Pastor, skating in at the last minute again,” joked a member of the evangelism committee. I wasn’t there, but I can just imagine my husband’s neck get red as he tried to remain calm and respond to the ill-timed, less-than-appropriate attempt at humor in a loving, pastoral manner. Little did the parishioner know that my husband had just stayed up until 3:00 in the morning the night before, was juggling work between two church campuses, had just come from two previous meetings (both of which had gone long), was trying to handle all the congregational responsibilities while the other pastor was gone for a week, and had just received a disappointing email from our son’s teacher just a few minutes before the meeting.

Ofentimes, I get the impression that most people don’t really realize how a pastor (or other church workers) put their heart and soul into their work. A common joke is that pastors “only work two hours on Sunday,” because that’s when they are in front of the congregation, but let me assure you that pastors and church workers take sharing the Gospel very seriously. Saving souls is no laughing matter. Pastors see themselves as shepherds of their congregation, and they truly do not want any sheep to be lost and fall away from Jesus, the Good Shepherd. And like any service occupation, church workers have an emotional investment in those to whom they minister because they truly care. Such Christ-centered empathy is powerful, yet also can be exhausting.

More often than not, our family has been blessed by parishioners who make us smile, and some with whom we can truly let our hair down, relax, and laugh. We are grateful for those who bring over meals when they know it’s a busy week, or those who have shared a gift card to express appreciation, or those who just make our day as they recognize something we’ve done or when they say, “You know, you’re really good at what you do.” These caring individuals seem to realize what the apostle Paul meant when he said, *We ask you brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a).*

Because we live in a broken, sinful world (and we all are, indeed, sinners) we may say inconsiderate things to one another and often don’t realize how these words may hurt. We all are tempted to look at situations through our own perspective and not consider others’. Our culture feeds the selfish attitude that finds it more and more difficult to hear when we do something wrong or make a bad choice.

Thankfully for us, Jesus humbled Himself and came to earth to be one of us. Jesus understands our feelings. As our sinless substitute, Jesus took all our sins, shame, and selfishness upon Himself. Through His sacrifice on the cross, we are forgiven and set free from those sinful tendencies that cloud our perspectives.

That is why pastors and church workers continue to do what they do, day in and day out. They will continue to work diligently, knowing that their labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58), because they want all people to know Jesus, to be saved through faith in Him alone, and to experience the eternal joy, laughter, and happiness we will one day all share together in heaven. That is what truly gets my husband's heart racing and makes him passionate. Knowing others are growing in the knowledge and love of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ puts a smile on his face any time of the day.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for humbling Yourself to become true man and understand our human frailties. Thank You, most of all, for humbling Yourself to die on the cross to forgive our inconsiderate and disrespectful attitudes. Restore to us all the joy of Your salvation! Amen.

Showing Our Pastors and Church Workers Love and Respect
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Loving and Respecting Authority Bible Study

[**Please provide:** a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, hymnals]

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

Opening Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, guide our conversation today that we might be drawn closer to You and to one another in our shared faith. Help us as we work together in Your kingdom. We thank and praise You for the many ways You shower Your gifts upon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

When I read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 in my Bible, I see this heading “Final Instructions and Benediction” above the paragraph. As the mother of two college age kids, my thoughts go directly to the things I say, or have said, to my children when I leave them or they leave me. Over the years my closing parental comments have changed a bit. They’ve gone from “Listen to the babysitter and go to bed when she tells you to” to “Drive carefully, watch your speed, and get your homework done”, but always I close with an “I love you.” While the specifics have changed a bit, most of my parental parting comments over the years would fall under the category of “Have a good day, but behave.”

Do I give these instructions because I think my kids are naughty? No, generally speaking, they are kids that stay out of trouble. However, I know that they, too, are born with the same sinful nature that lives within us all. As a mother, I feel like part of my job is to teach them the proper way to behave and I would hope that they would behave well whether I was there to scold them or not. Isn't that what we all hope for as parents? Perhaps we even hope that our kids behave better when we're not around.

Discuss with another group member: What do you typically tell your kids right before you drop them off or before you leave?

What do you remember your parents saying to you right before they left when you were a kid?

What did you tell your child when you dropped him or her off at college? _____

Do you notice any patterns or similarities? _____

Why do I want my kids to behave? Well, that's a silly question! It's because it makes me look better, of course. (Ha! Ha!) No, that's my sinful, prideful nature talking. I want my children to behave and follow the rules because I know that their lives will be better if they do. God didn't give us the Ten Commandments because He wanted to make our lives harder or more restricted. He gave us the Commandments because He loves us. He gave us those rules for living because He knew that our lives and our world would be better if we followed them. His rules give us a blueprint for a God-pleasing and a God-honoring life.

The Gift Of Order

God is a God of order. He ordered our world in so many wonderful ways, and all for our benefit. One of the ways that He has provided order for us is through setting up structures of authority.

Read Exodus 20:12. In Luther's Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains the Fourth Commandment in this way: "*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them." (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH ©2017, page 14)

The Fourth Commandment teaches us concerning the first authorities we are most familiar with, our mother and father. We learn to respect and honor these parental authorities in our lives and from there grows our understanding of other authority, including pastors and other church workers.

Good order is also a gift that God has given to His people. And as such, when He sets up authorities in our lives, we think of them as gifts. As with the rules that He has given us to live by, (the Ten Commandments), God doesn't give us authorities to oppress us, but rather so that we have a good structure within which to function.

God gave His people many good and faithful leaders throughout the Old and New Testament. Name at least four that you remember. _____

Note that even though all these people had serious flaws, God used them to lead His people. What are some specific facts that you remember about these leaders and their leadership styles? _____

Now let's shift gears just a bit.

Gifts In Ordinary Wrappings

Have you ever received a gift from someone you love that didn't seem like a very nice gift? One year for my birthday, my husband gave me an electric knife and that was it, no flowers, no romantic anything, just a hastily wrapped box with an electric knife. My first reaction was, "Gee, thanks...I guess." In my mind I had a vision of him as he scooted through the store at the last minute, looking for a present, until he stumbled upon something that I might like. I made the assumption that he hadn't thought about me or this gift. I couldn't have been more wrong. Well, I was right about the last minute part, but he had, in fact, put some thought into this gift. When I looked so underwhelmed upon opening my gift he said, "I thought you could really use this, especially for your good home-made bread, and when you make a roast or a chicken. It just seemed like you really needed something like this." He was totally right. I did really need that

knife. I use that knife all the time now. As it turned out he knew better than I did what I needed. What are some of your favorite unexpected gifts that you've received? _____

Perhaps you've received a gift in a dented box or wrapped in a plain paper bag. It didn't look too good and you didn't have high hopes about the contents, but once you opened it, the gift was truly wonderful. Or maybe you've had just the opposite happen: someone hands you a fancy-looking box and you have big expectations for something expensive or much desired to be inside, only to open it and find something you didn't really want. Sometimes the old adage, "You can't judge a book by its cover," is very true.

All this to say, sometimes God gives His gifts in ordinary looking wrappings. We're very accustomed to this idea when we talk about God's gifts of the means of grace— God's gifts given in ordinary means like ordinary water (combined with God's extraordinary Word), and bread and wine. God also uses ordinary people to carry out His work among us.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7. How does God describe the leaders He gives us? _____

What does this description mean? _____

Read Hebrews 13:17. How are we to show respect to those God has put in place to lead us, particularly in the church? _____

What special responsibility does God give to pastors? _____

What brings a pastor his greatest joy? _____

Reread 2 Thessalonians 5:12–13. Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians as an encouragement to the believers who were being persecuted. Paul wanted to remind them to stay close to Jesus. How might these parting words help the believers to stay close to Jesus?

In light of our earlier conversation about parental parting words, the gift of good order and God's gifts coming in ordinary packages, how might these words be read for our lives today? _____

God places pastors, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses and other church workers in our congregations and schools to do His work. He gives us these leaders to share the precious message of the Gospel with us and others. He gives us these leaders to help keep good order in the organizations of our church. Sometimes, these leaders might remind us of that electric knife I once received. Because of their ordinary humanity, we may look at them and think, "Gee thanks, God...I guess. This really wasn't who I was hoping for." But God knows what and who we need better than we do. These leaders are gifts from our Lord and Savior. When Paul wrote these words to the believers in Thessalonica, he knew that they needed that same gentle reminder that we sometimes leave with our children: "Pay attention to these people that God gave you. They are there because God loves you." Paul's reminder is also for us, as we all have

times when we fail to hold in proper regard the leaders that God has placed in our midst. Through the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to work together in His kingdom to share the Gospel. Pastors and church workers are human reminders of His love for us with whom He gifts us.

For personal reflection, sharing optional: Are you currently giving the respect God expects to your pastor and other leaders He has placed in your congregation? _____

What are some specific ways that you can show love and respect to your pastor and other church workers in your congregation? _____

Closing Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of all the professional church workers in our midst. Help us to work together with them to share the Gospel with believers and unbelievers in our communities and beyond. More than anything, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to die for our sins and rise again so that we may all spend eternity together with You in heaven. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Sing: "We Are Called to Stand Together," LSB 828

Loving and Respecting Authority
Written by Lisa Krenz, Hoffman, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League 2019



Loving and Respecting Authority

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, hymnals]

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

Opening Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, guide our conversation today that we might be drawn closer to You and to one another in our shared faith. Help us as we work together in Your kingdom. We thank and praise You for the many ways You shower Your gifts upon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

When I read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 in my Bible, I see this heading “Final Instructions and Benediction” above the paragraph. As the mother of two college age kids, my thoughts go directly to the things I say, or have said, to my children when I leave them or they leave me. Over the years my closing parental comments have changed a bit. They’ve gone from “Listen to the babysitter and go to bed when she tells you to” to “Drive carefully, watch your speed, and get your homework done”, but always I close with an “I love you.” While the specifics have changed a bit, most of my parental parting comments over the years would fall under the category of “Have a good day, but behave.”

Do I give these instructions because I think my kids are naughty? No, generally speaking, they are kids that stay out of trouble. However, I know that they, too, are born with the same sinful nature that lives within us all. As a mother, I feel like part of my job is to teach them the proper way to behave and I would hope that they would behave well whether I was there to scold them or not. Isn't that what we all hope for as parents? Perhaps we even hope that our kids behave better when we're not around.

Discuss with another group member: What do you typically tell your kids right before you drop them off or before you leave? Give participants a chance to share with a partner and with the entire group.

What do you remember your parents saying to you right before they left when you were a kid?

Give participants a chance to share with a partner and with the entire group.

What did you tell your child when you dropped him or her off at college? Encourage participants who have had such an experience to share.

Do you notice any patterns or similarities? Lead group members to identify any such patterns or similarities within their own responses and within the group's responses as a whole.

Why do I want my kids to behave? Well, that's a silly question! It's because it makes me look better, of course. (Ha! Ha!) No, that's my sinful, prideful nature talking. I want my children to behave and follow the rules because I know that their lives will be better if they do. God didn't give us the Ten Commandments because He wanted to make our lives harder or more restricted. He gave us the Commandments because He loves us. He gave us those rules for living because He knew that our lives and our world would be better if we followed them. His rules give us a blueprint for a God-pleasing and a God-honoring life.

The Gift Of Order

God is a God of order. He ordered our world in so many wonderful ways, and all for our benefit. One of the ways that He has provided order for us is through setting up structures of authority.

Read Exodus 20:12. In Luther's Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains the Fourth Commandment in this way: "*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them." (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH ©2017, page 14)

The Fourth Commandment teaches us concerning the first authorities we are most familiar with, our mother and father. We learn to respect and honor these parental authorities in our lives and from there grows our understanding of other authorities, including pastors and other church workers.

Good order is also a gift that God has given to His people. And as such, when He sets up authorities in our lives, we think of them as gifts. As with the rules that He has given us to live by, (the Ten Commandments), God doesn't give us authorities to oppress us, but rather so that we have a good structure within which to function.

God gave His people many good and faithful leaders throughout the Old and New Testament. Name at least four that you remember. Answers may include Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Deborah, Daniel, Peter, and Paul.

Note that even though all these people had serious flaws, God used them to lead His people. What are some specific facts that you remember about these leaders and their leadership styles? As participants respond, lead them to recognize that these Biblical leaders had flaws and were sinful. Also point out how God led them to turn to Him in prayer for forgiveness and well as for the strength and wisdom to lead His people.

Now let's shift gears just a bit.

Gifts In Ordinary Wrappings

Have you ever received a gift from someone you love that didn't seem like a very nice gift? One year for my birthday, my husband gave me an electric knife and that was it, no flowers, no romantic anything, just a hastily wrapped box with an electric knife. My first reaction was, "Gee, thanks...I guess." In my mind I had a vision of him as he scooted through the store at the last minute, looking for a present, until he stumbled upon something that I might like. I made the assumption that he hadn't thought about me or this gift. I couldn't have been more wrong. Well, I was right about the last minute part, but he had, in fact, put some thought into this gift. When I looked so underwhelmed upon opening my gift he said, "I thought you could really use this,

especially for your good home-made bread, and when you make a roast or a chicken. It just seemed like you really needed something like this.” He was totally right. I did really need that knife. I use that knife all the time now. As it turned out he knew better than I did what I needed. What are some of your favorite unexpected gifts that you’ve received? Encourage participants to share their experiences.

Perhaps you’ve received a gift in a dented box or wrapped in a plain paper bag. It didn’t look too good and you didn’t have high hopes about the contents, but once you opened it, the gift was truly wonderful. Or maybe you’ve had just the opposite happen: someone hands you a fancy-looking box and you have big expectations for something expensive or much desired to be inside, only to open it and find something you didn’t really want. Sometimes the old adage, “You can’t judge a book by its cover,” is very true.

All this to say, sometimes God gives His gifts in ordinary looking wrappings. We’re very accustomed to this idea when we talk about God’s gifts of the means of grace— God’s gifts given in ordinary means like ordinary water (combined with God’s extraordinary Word), and bread and wine. God also uses ordinary people to carry out His work among us.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7. How does God describe the leaders He gives us? They are described as treasures in jars of clay.

What does this description mean? They are ordinary, fragile people who are great gifts to us from God.

Read Hebrews 13:17. How are we to show respect to those God has put in place to lead us, particularly in the church? God directs us to obey our leaders and submit to them, not out of subjugation or oppression, but because He has appointed them to the task as His representatives.

What special responsibility does God give to pastors? Pastors are to keep watch over [our] souls, which is a huge job. Both in corporate worship and in individual settings, pastors lead their congregations to recognize their sins and to repent of them. Pastors then have the joy to pronounce to people God’s forgiveness and grace in Christ Jesus. Pastors have the privilege to lead people in worship and praise of the Triune God. Pastors have the God-given responsibility to preach and teach the true Word of God, both Law and Gospel, to their congregations and communities. Pastors baptize individuals in the one true faith and welcome them as members of God’s family. Pastors eagerly invite their communicant members to partake in Holy Communion where believers receive forgiveness of sins and strength to follow and serve God. God also directs us to let them do this with joy and not with groaning. As partners in the Gospel, we work with our pastors to help them tell the world of Jesus’ saving love as well as pray for their needs and encourage them.

What brings a pastor his greatest joy? A pastor’s greatest joy is when his flock trusts in the Triune God, believes God’s Word, and lives their lives according to God’s will.

Reread 2 Thessalonians 5:12–13. Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians as an encouragement to the believers who were being persecuted. Paul wanted to remind them to stay close to Jesus. How might these parting words help the believers to stay close to Jesus? God has placed pastors, Christian teachers, and other church workers among us to teach us God’s Word. We show our respect for them when we listen to them and learn from them.

In light of our earlier conversation about parental parting words, the gift of good order and God’s gifts coming in ordinary packages, how might these words be read for our lives today? God has

given us pastors and other church workers to share the Gospel with His people and to guide us in the way God wants us to go. These leaders are gifts whom God has given us. Sometimes they may not seem so grand or charismatic. They are ordinary people as we are, but that doesn't mean they aren't a wonderful gift that God has given us to encourage us and to share with us the truths of God's Word.

God places pastors, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses and other church workers in our congregations and schools to do His work. He gives us these leaders to share the precious message of the Gospel with us and others. He gives us these leaders to help keep good order in the organizations of our church. Sometimes, these leaders might remind us of that electric knife I once received. Because of their ordinary humanity, we may look at them and think, "Gee thanks, God...I guess. This really wasn't who I was hoping for." But God knows what and who we need better than we do. These leaders are gifts from our Lord and Savior. When Paul wrote these words to the believers in Thessalonica, he knew that they needed that same gentle reminder that we sometimes leave with our children: "Pay attention to these people that God gave you. They are there because God loves you." Paul's reminder is also for us, as we all have times when we fail to hold in proper regard the leaders that God has placed in our midst. Through the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to work together in His kingdom to share the Gospel. Pastors and church workers are human reminders of His love for us with whom He gifts us.

For personal reflection, sharing optional: Are you currently giving the respect God expects to your pastor and other leaders He has placed in your congregation? This question leads the participant to look inwardly at her own heart. When we publically criticize our pastor or other church leaders or do it privately with another church member, we are not giving these leaders the respect and love God commands us to give them. Be aware that someone may ask what should be done when we have an issue with a pastor or other church worker especially concerning the teaching of God's Word in its truth and purity. This is an issue that should be handled with the procedure described in Matthew 18:15–20. God directs us to first go to the person and speak with him privately. If the situation is not resolved, others, such as church elders, a circuit visitor, or other church authorities can gradually be made aware of the situation so that a God-pleasing resolution might occur.

What are some specific ways that you can show love and respect to your pastor and other church workers in your congregation? Ways mentioned might include praying for pastors and church workers, speaking highly of them especially among people who are not a part of your congregation, complimenting them on things they do well, supporting them in their efforts with your willing and joyful participation, paying them well, and giving them times of rest and relaxation with their families.

Closing Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of all the professional church workers in our midst. Help us to work together with them to share the Gospel with believers and unbelievers in our communities and beyond. More than anything, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to die for our sins and rise again so that we may all spend eternity together with You in heaven. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

Sing: "We Are Called to Stand Together," LSB 828

Loving and Respecting Authority
Leader's Guide
Written by Lisa Krenz, Hoffman, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



TAKING TIME TO CONTEM'PLATE

Devotion

[Please provide: two readers, Bible, one 9-inch plain white paper plate with “grooves” on the outside for each participant, black pens, seven sheets of poster board, marker]

To prepare: Before the devotion, prepare a sample plate. In all capital letters, print the word “CONTEM'PLATE” horizontally across the center of the plate. Around the inner circle of the plate starting at “2 o'clock,” print Psalm 106:1: *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!* Print the word CONTEM'PLATE and the words of Psalm 106:1 on the board and display the plate you've prepared near it. As participants arrive, have each person prepare a paper plate. On the poster board sheets, print the seven points as outlined in this devotion, one point per sheet. In the Bible, mark Luke 17:11–19.

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks (Luke 17:15–16a).

Whenever the baseball season begins in late March, we focus on home plate. As the day of Thanksgiving arrives on the last Thursday of November, it is a time to focus on plates at home—literally as well as figuratively—based on the words of Luke 17:11–19. Let's listen to this Bible account now.

Bible reader shares out loud Luke 17:11–19.

As we contemplate the miraculous healing of the Ten Lepers, just think! Leprosy was an awful skin disease that was unsightly, painful, and incurable. Its victims were ostracized from their families and the rest of society. The disease was debilitating! Embarrassing! Downright depressing! Thus, their plates were piled high with misery!

As Jesus cleansed those ten lepers, He converted their sense of hopelessness into a hope-filled joy! As those lepers realized that they were healed, by all rights, all ten should have turned back immediately, acknowledging God's almighty Son as the source of their healing. But only one out of the ten men took the time to contemplate how his life had been changed for the better by Jesus and returned to give God thanks.

It has been said, “Thinking always precedes thanking!” Just think! Plagued by the leprosy of sin from the time of conception, we have been renewed and refreshed in Christ through water and the Word! Our eternal future is secure! We enjoy a new lease on life! As Thanksgiving Day approaches, let's take some time to contemplate—to think and to thank—by following a seven-point outline.

Hold up the poster board with Point 1.

POINT 1: The problem of having too much on our plates.

Do the following two expressions sound familiar? “I've got too many things to do, and not enough time to do them all!” “I can't see the forest for the trees!” In all likelihood, they do! Beyond the sheer quantity of our responsibilities, to make matters worse, many of the things piled high on our plates are not our favorite things on our “to do list”. Even as brussel sprouts,

broccoli or spinach may not be on our “to eat list” on Thanksgiving Day, there are many unappetizing activities on our plates that we are forced to “choke down.”

Hold up the poster board with Point 2.

POINT 2: The problem of having not enough on our plates.

While we may not be millionaires, we are far from poor. Unlike so many in this world who are less fortunate, we have more than enough to eat and to live. However, many people have too little on their plates. What’s more, in this leisure-oriented society, many don’t know what to do with themselves. As a result, they do nothing. And so, they get bored; and boredom can lead to trouble, for “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.”

At times, we fall into the trap of seemingly having nothing to do. However, as we take a good look around, there’s plenty to do; and we have plenty of incentive to stay busy, because...

Hold up the poster board with Point 3.

POINT 3: God fills our plates daily with a well-balanced diet for body and soul.

The fact that God fully fills our material plates is clearly stated in Psalm 145:15–16, *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.* Spiritually, 2 Corinthians 8:9b says of Jesus, *Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.* Our two-part, God-given wealth is seen in...

Hold up the poster board with Point 4.

POINT 4: We have more than plenty for both body and soul on our individual plates.

We can pat our bellies and say, “I’m full!” If we could pat our souls, we could say, “I’m full” as well! Psalm 23:1–3a declares, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.* The psalm goes on to say in verse 5: *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* As our physical and spiritual plates are piled high...

Hold up the poster board with Point 5.

POINT 5: We are called to triply share our abundant blessings with others.

Our overabundance of individual blessings can be summarized in the three T’s of stewardship: Time, Talents, and Treasure. On the day of national Thanksgiving, we take the time to appreciate our God-given talents that we enjoy, day in and day out. Plus, as we appreciate our God-given treasure, we can share that wealth through monetary as well as food offerings. As we do this, we think about the words “grace” and “mercy.” It has been said that “grace” is when “God does give us what we don’t deserve” and that “mercy” is when “God doesn’t give us what we do deserve.” In view of God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, let’s wind down by contemplating two final definitions: one for “thanksgiving;” the other for “thanks-living.”

Hold up the poster board with Point 6.

POINT 6: Counting our blessings as we daily contemplate and express our appreciation and praise to God = thanks‘giving’!

Along these lines, this poem hits home. An anonymous author has written:

Count your blessings instead of your crosses; Count your gains instead of your losses.
Count your joys instead of your woes; Count your friends instead of your foes.
Count your smiles instead of your tears; Count your courage instead of your fears.
Count your full years instead of your lean; Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.
Count your health instead of your wealth; Count on God instead of yourself.

In that spirit of counting our blessings, we are ready to conclude with a focus on...

Hold up the poster board with Point 7.

POINT 7: Making our blessings count as we daily celebrate = thanks'living!

It has been said, "It's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." In that regard, our Savior and Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, declares in John 10:10b, *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* We can summarize the definition for "thanks-living" in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31, *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.*

Look again at the paper plate you prepared earlier. On the ridges around the outside of the plate, write down at least five blessings for which you thank God. Display your plate on your Thanksgiving table as a reminder to *give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.*

Closing Prayer: Gracious Lord, acknowledging You as the Creator of all that is good and provider of all that is necessary, we rejoice on this day that we are not only blessed beyond belief; we are blessed with belief! Assured that we have been fully restored from the leprosy of sin so that we might have life, and have it to the full, may we daily contemplate all the ways that we have been blessed so that every day might become a day of thanksgiving and thanks'living as we give all thanks and praise to You for all that we are and have. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Taking Time to Contem'plate"
Written by Pastor Terry Grebing, Renault, IL
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Always Thankful Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study, Bibles, musical accompaniment, and hymnals for attendees]

Opening prayer: Dear Lord God, heavenly Father, send Your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and eyes so that we may see how we are to be “always thankful.” Show us in Your Word the way to a truly thankful heart. Amen.

The Apostle Paul tells us to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). It is easy to give God thanks for His blessings and for sending His son, Jesus to die for our sins. But can you honestly say that you give thanks in all of your circumstances, good or bad?

There are three very good reasons to be “Always Thankful” in all our circumstances.

1. Be “Always Thankful” to our Creator Who has Made the Heavens, the Earth, and You

Read Isaiah 40:28–31.

Who is the Lord? He is the _____, the _____ of the _____ of the earth.

What other characteristics of God do you find in these verses? _____

What does God supply to the weary and the weak? _____

When was the last time you went out at night to look into the sky without any light pollution and saw how vast the stars are? God knows the name of each of them and holds them in their places. Man has only begun to discover the conditions for life to exist and that there is only one planet like the earth suitable for us. God placed the earth right where it needed to be for us to peer out and marvel at the vastness of His creation.

What wonders of this world make you stop and say, “This could only be the hand of God”? _____

Read Romans 3:19–20. Even with all creation surrounding us, we still have problems with being “Always Thankful.” That problem is called sin. We have a problem living by the law that God created for the world.

What is the purpose of the Law? _____

Read Romans 3:23; 6:23 and 1 John 1:8.

Who has sinned? _____

What is the wages of our sin? _____

What if you say you have no sin? _____

2. Be “Always Thankful” for the Cross of Christ

We are sinners. Yet, God loves us. Because of His great love for us, He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price we could not pay to be redeemed from sin.

Read Mark 10:45 and Hebrews 10:10 to complete this sentence: Jesus came to be the _____ for many and the sacrifice _____ for _____.

Read Hebrews 4:15 and 1 John 4:10 to complete this sentence: Jesus was _____ sin to be the _____ for our sins. Through His perfect life and His death for our sins, Jesus satisfied God’s demands for the perfect keeping of His Law and for the payment required for our sinful disobedience.

Read Hebrews 12:2 to complete this sentence: Jesus _____ the _____ of the cross.

Read John 3:16 and John 1:12–13 to complete this sentence: So that by _____ in Him we might have _____ and be called the _____ of God.

All our debts have been paid by Jesus our Savior! What a reason to be “always thankful!” As Colossians 2:13–14 says, *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.* Because of what Jesus our Savior did for us on the cross, and because He rose from the dead, we can be “always thankful” as the Holy Spirit leads us to always keep the cross of Christ before us.

In this season of thankfulness as you reflect on what Jesus did for you on the cross, for what in particular would you like to thank Him? Write your thoughts in the form of a “thank you” note.
Dear Jesus, my risen Savior ...

3. Be “Always Thankful” in Trials—They Serve a Purpose

It’s been said that when God wants you to grow, He makes you uncomfortable. Therefore, we can give thanks in all our circumstances because God is love and always has our best interest in mind. We can consider it joy in various trials because God wants us to grow.

Read James 1:2–3. What does the testing of your faith produce? _____

What does it mean to be *steadfast*? _____

Read 1 Peter 1:5–7. What purpose do the trials in our lives serve? _____

Read 1 Peter 4:12–13. Not only are we to give thanks in all circumstances but we are to *rejoice* in our trials. Trials are tough. How can we rejoice in them? _____

Recall a trial you've faced. From this experience, for what can you thank God? _____

Read Romans 8:28. What reassurance do you find here? _____

Read the following verses. What does each one tell you about God?

Isaiah 54:10: _____

Hebrews 13:5b: _____

1 Corinthians 1:9: _____

How do these descriptions of who God is and how He feels about you give you reason to be thankful in all circumstances? _____

What benefits are found from being with someone who is thankful in difficult circumstances? _____

Read each proverb below and complete the statements.

Proverbs 15:13: A glad heart makes a _____.

Proverbs 15:15: The cheerful of heart has a _____.

Proverbs 17:22: A joyful heart is _____.

How do we achieve an attitude of thankfulness? _____

Holy Scripture provides us with examples of individuals who in trying times, praised and thanked God. Though he suffered at the hands of King Saul as a young man and later as Israel's king, David gave thanks to God.

Read 1 Chronicles 16:8–30. What did David say to make known (v. 8)? _____

What did David say the people (including us) are to tell about (vv. 9, 23)? _____

What are we to remember (vv. 12, 15)? _____

What are we to declare (v. 24)? _____

According to verses 28–30 how else are we to give thanks to God? _____

Read Psalm 28:6–7. What particular quality of God do these verses mention for which we can be “always thankful?” _____

Knowing that God is almighty, how does this affect your thankful attitude? _____

Closing prayer: Dear Lord God, forgive us when we are not thankful in all things. Through Your Holy Spirit, open our eyes to see Your wondrous works in our lives and fill our hearts with thanksgiving so that we may now give thanks in all our circumstances. Help us always to remember You are love and You will never leave us nor forsake us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Sing: “Rise, Shine You People,” LSB 825

Always Thankful
Written by Patricia Willoughby, Georgetown, Texas
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Always Thankful

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: copies of this study, Bibles, musical accompaniment, and hymnals for attendees.]

Opening prayer: Dear Lord God, heavenly Father, send Your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and eyes so that we may see how we are to be always thankful. Show us in Your Word the way to a truly thankful heart. Amen

The Apostle Paul tells us to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). It is easy to give God thanks for His blessings and for sending His son, Jesus to die for our sins. But can you honestly say that you give thanks in all of your circumstances, good or bad?

There are three very good reasons to be “Always Thankful” in all our circumstances.

1. Be “Always Thankful” to our Creator Who has Made the Heavens, the Earth and You

Read Isaiah 40:28–31.

Who is the Lord? He is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

What other characteristics of God do you find in these verses? He does not faint or grow weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.

What does God supply to the weary and the weak? God gives power to the weary and increases the strength of the weak.

When was the last time you went out at night to look into the sky without any light pollution and saw how vast the stars are? God knows the name of each of them and holds them in their places. Man has only begun to discover the conditions for life to exist and that there is only one planet like the earth suitable for us. God placed the earth right where it needed to be for us to peer out and marvel at the vastness of His creation.

What wonders of this world makes you stop and say, “This could only be the hand of God”?
Encourage participants to discuss amazing aspects of God’s creation.

Read Romans 3:19–20. Even with all creation surrounding us, we still have problems with being “Always Thankful.” That problem is called sin. We have a problem living by the law that God created for the world.

What is the purpose of the Law?
The Law shows us our sin and shows us our need for a Savior.

Read Romans 3:23, 6:23 and 1 John 1:8.

Who has sinned? All have sinned (Romans 3:23).

What is the wages of our sin? The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

What if you say you have no sin? If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

2. Be “Always Thankful” for the Cross of Christ

We are sinners. Yet, God loves us. Because of His great love for us, He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price we could not pay to be redeemed from sin.

Read Mark 10:45 and Hebrews 10:10 to complete this sentence: Jesus came to be the ransom for many and the sacrifice once for all.

Read Hebrews 4:15 and 1 John 4:10 to complete this sentence: Jesus was without sin to be the propitiation for our sins. Through His perfect life and His death for our sins, Jesus satisfied God’s demands for the perfect keeping of His Law and for the payment required for our sinful disobedience.

Read Hebrews 12:2 to complete this sentence: Jesus despised the shame of the cross.

Read John 3:16 and John 1:12–13 to complete this sentence: So that by believing in Him we might have eternal life and be called the children of God.

All our debts have been paid by Jesus our Savior! What a reason to be “always thankful!” As Colossians 2:13–14 says, *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.* Because of what Jesus our Savior did for us on the cross, and because He rose from the dead, we can be “always thankful” as the Holy Spirit leads us to always keep the cross of Christ before us.

In this season of thankfulness as you reflect on what Jesus did for you on the cross, for what in particular would you like to thank Him? Write your thoughts in the form of a “thank you” note.
Dear Jesus, my risen Savior ...

3. Be “Always Thankful” in Trials—They Serve a Purpose

It’s been said that when God wants you to grow, He makes you uncomfortable. Therefore, we can give thanks in all our circumstances because God is love and has our best interest in mind. We can consider it joy in various trials because God wants us to grow.

Read James 1:2–3. What does the testing of your faith produce? The testing of our faith produces steadfastness.

What does it mean to be *steadfast*? To be *steadfast* means to be firmly fixed in place or position; to be unwavering.

Read: 1 Peter 1:5–7. What purpose do the trials in our lives serve? God uses the trials in our lives to test our faith, to strengthen our faith, and to draw us closer to Him.

Read 1 Peter 4:12–13. Not only are we to give thanks in all circumstances but we are to *rejoice* in our trials. Trials are tough. How can we rejoice in them? As we share in Christ's sufferings while we live our lives on earth, we will rejoice when Jesus' glory is revealed to us at His second coming, and as we live with Him in our heavenly home. As we recognize that God uses the trials in our lives to draw us closer to Him, this is also a reason to rejoice. We can also rejoice because God is always with us no matter what troubles we face.

Recall a trial you've faced. From this experience, for what can you thank God? Encourage participants to share their responses.

Read Romans 8:28. What reassurance do you find here? God reminds us that He works in all things for the good of those who love Him.

Read the following verses. What does each one tell you about God?

Isaiah 54:10: God's love is steadfast and will never go away.

Hebrews 13:5b: The Lord promises He will never leave you nor forsake you.

1 Corinthians 1:9: God is faithful.

How do these descriptions of who God is and how He feels about you give you reason to be thankful in all circumstances? Knowing that God keeps all His promises, we are thankful because we know He will always love us and will never leave us and that He is always faithful.

What benefits are found from being around someone who is thankful even in difficult circumstances? An individual with an "attitude of gratitude" gives glory to God and reminds us to focus on God's constant blessings to us.

Read each proverb below and complete the statements.

Proverbs 15:13: A glad heart makes a cheerful face .

Proverbs 15:15: The cheerful of heart has a continual feast.

Proverbs 17:22: A joyful heart is good medicine.

How do we achieve an attitude of thankfulness? We achieve an attitude of thankfulness by the power of the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to all that the Triune God does for us. Through God's means of grace, we are constantly reminded of all the good God works in our lives, especially through Jesus our Savior.

Holy Scripture provides us with examples of individuals who in trying times, praised and thanked God. Though he suffered at the hands of King Saul as a young man and later as Israel's king, David gave thanks to God.

Read 1 Chronicles 16:8–30. What did David say to make known (v. 8)? David said to tell everyone of God's deeds.

What did David say the people (including us) are to tell about (vv.9, 23)? All God's people are to tell of His wondrous works.

What are we to remember (vv. 12, 15)? We are to remember all the wonderful things God has done and continues to do in our lives, His miracles, His judgments, and the covenant He has established with us.

What are we to declare (v. 24)? We are to declare God's glory among the nations and all the great things He has done and continues to do for everyone.

According to verses 28–30, how else are we to give thanks to God? We are to sing praises to God and to give Him glory.

Read: Psalm 28:6–7. What particular quality of God do these verses mention for which we can be “always thankful?” We can be always thankful because of God's strength.

Knowing that God is almighty, how does this affect your thankful attitude? God gives us His strength so that we can do all things through faith in Him (Philippians 4:13).

Closing prayer: Dear Lord God, forgive us when we are not thankful in all things. Through Your Holy Spirit, open our eyes to see Your wondrous works in our lives and fill our hearts with thanksgiving that we may now give thanks in all our circumstances. Help us to always remember You are love and You will never leave us nor forsake us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Sing: “*Rise, Shine You People*,” LSB 825

Always Thankful
Leader's Guide
Written by Patricia Willoughby, Georgetown, Texas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Decorating the Mitten Tree Program

[Please provide: leader, 7 readers, a small real or artificial Christmas tree, at least 7 pairs of children's mittens or gloves which will later be given to a local school or social service agency, copies of this program for all participants including those who are not designated readers]

Leader: Let's begin by reading together the LWML Pledge:

All: In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood bought gift of redemption, we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have, and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen. (Rev. Harry Fricke ©1955 LWML)

Leader: Our Lord Jesus used His hands in many different ways as He lived here on earth. With His hands Jesus fed people, healed people, and comforted people. Most importantly, Jesus allowed His hands to be nailed to the cross as He gave up His perfect life to save our imperfect one. Jesus did this because it was the only way that we could be rescued from the eternal death that we deserve because of our sins. Such love our Savior Jesus showed us with His hands!

Now, let us take our hands and place them on the table before us. [Invite individuals to examine their own hands.] As we said the LWML Pledge, we once again consecrated our hands to our Savior to work for Him. Though our hands may be smooth and slender, short and stubby, calloused or freckled, it doesn't matter for our hands were made by God and they are beautiful. We lift our hands in praise to God for we are *fearfully and wonderfully made* (Psalm 139:14). By the power of the Holy Spirit, we use our hands to reach out to others in the name of Christ Jesus in service to Him.

Reader One: When we were small, it took us some time to learn how to hold a spoon, to color a picture, to cut with scissors, and to tie our shoes. But the Lord has known us since before we were even conceived. He was with us as we were formed in our mothers' wombs. In Holy Baptism, God gave us faith in Him and made us His children. By His grace, we can now do many things with our hands. [Picks up a pair of mittens.] We may not be able to knit, but by the work of our hands we have purchased these mittens and now present them to be given to a child in need. May God bless the child who will receive these mittens. May this child grow to know, love, and serve our Lord Jesus Christ. [Hangs the pair of mittens on the tree.]

Reader Two: In the LWML Pledge, we promise to give our Savior "our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us." Jesus told His disciples, "*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay*" (Matthew 10:8). Jesus gave His disciples the power to do all these things in His name. [Picks up a pair of mittens.] As Jesus' disciples today, we can give this pair of mittens to safeguard the health of one of His little ones. We daily receive so much from the hand of God that we freely and happily give these mittens in service to Him. [Hangs the pair of mittens on the tree.]

Reader Three: Our Lord Jesus also said, *“And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward”* (Matthew 10:42). [Picks up a pair of mittens.] Now it is not a cup of cold water we give, but it is a pair of new, warm mittens. Our reward from You, O Lord, is the joy we receive as we give this gift in Your name. [Hangs the pair of mittens on the tree.]

Reader Four: Have you ever had really cold hands? Because of the cold, have your hands ever turned red or even blue? Have your hands ever been so cold that your fingers have lost feeling? I remember losing my mittens on the playground once in a pile of snow. I walked home crying from the pain of my cold hands. When I reached my home, my mother put my hands in luke-cool water and slowly, the feeling came back to my fingers. [Picks up a pair of mittens.] Such a simple thing, this pair of mittens, but what a blessing on a cold, winter day. Jesus said, *“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’”* (Matthew 25:40). Our Lord Jesus has compassion on all who are in physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual need. The Holy Spirit gives us the compassion of Christ in our hearts as we bring these mittens for one of the *least of these*. [Hangs the pair of mittens on the tree.]

Reader Five: Proverbs 31 tells about the virtuous woman. This Scripture says that the virtuous woman ... *works with willing hands* (v. 13). *She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong* (v. 17). *She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy* (vv.19–20). *She makes linen garments and sells them* (v.24). *She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness* (v. 27). As modern Christian women, we probably don’t know how use a spinning wheel, but we can use a sewing machine, a microwave oven, drive a car, or use a computer. With whatever tools and abilities God gives us to use, we are empowered to work for Him in our households, local churches, communities, and throughout the world. [Picks up a pair of mittens.] What a privilege to present to the Lord the work of our *willing hands*. [Hangs the pair of mittens on the tree.]

Reader Six: Holy Scripture reminds us, *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). Despite earthly trials and troubles, as those redeemed by Jesus we can always give songs and prayers of thanks and praise to God. Jesus died and rose for our sins so that we might have God’s forgiveness and the sure and certain hope of eternal life. Daily God blesses us with His forgiveness and provides all that we need and even more. [Picks up a pair of mittens.] In gratitude for all that God has done and continues to do for us, we offer these mittens as we share with others the bounty with which God provides us. [Hangs the pair of mittens on the tree.]

Reader Seven: In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:14–16). As Jesus’ followers today, we tell others that He is the everlasting light of salvation and truth. We share Jesus’ saving love through the words we speak and the things we do. In this way, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are His lights in the world. [Picks up a pair of mittens.] Lord, may all that we give to others show them Your love and care for all and bring glory to You. [Hangs the pair of mittens on the tree.]

Leader: [To other participants besides the readers.] As Jesus' lights, let us all come forward and place the remaining pairs of mittens on the tree in glory and service to Him. [Invite all to come forward and hang the rest of the mittens on the tree.] And now, let us pray together:

All: Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the unbelievable, undeserved, tremendous gift of salvation, grace, forgiveness, and eternal life that You give us through faith in Jesus. Thank You for giving us hearts that love You and hands that serve You. Bless all who will receive these mittens. By the power of the Holy Spirit, when these individuals hear Your Word may each one come to faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Decorating the Mitten Tree
Written by Marcia Schwartz, Falls City, NE
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



A Sweet Season

Devotion

[Please provide: hymnals and accompaniment (if desired)]

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke 2:20

Each of us has experienced sweet seasons of our lives. Those are the days of great celebration or joy as a family, as a congregation, or as members of the LWML. For example, when the LWML gathers together in district or national conventions, it is often a very sweet season of celebration, fellowship, and service. Once the event is over, there is the long bus, plane, or car ride home, and we are back to our routines once again.

One Christian woman used to say, “Stop the clock,” whenever there was a time of celebration in her life, especially when children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren would gather. She wanted the moments to last as long as possible.

In Luke 2:20, the text for this devotion, the shepherds experienced that “sweet season” moment as they went to the birthplace of Jesus. They had been in their fields when they heard the announcement of the angels. Wow! That was an amazing moment. They went to Bethlehem and saw the baby lying in the manger, just as the Lord had made known to them. Wonder of wonders, they saw the Savior, Christ the Lord! Then they returned to their flocks, back to what they had been doing before. Except now it was different. The birth of Jesus changed their world forever.

In their initial excitement, the shepherds told everyone what they had seen and heard. Luke 2:17 says, “*And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.*” That excitement would be with them for a long time.

We, too, have had sweet seasons in our lives, when we grasp the extent of God’s love for us sinful and fallen creatures, forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ; times that we share what God has done for us. As His dearly loved children, forgiven and restored, we return to the places where we live and work and share that love of God with those He places in our paths.

Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension means we have a sweet season each time we gather in His name. When we meet in Word and Sacrament with the fellowship of believers, we receive the forgiveness of sins, grace, mercy, and strength to share what He has done for us.

As believers we also look forward to the time in which we will be gathered again together, with those who have gone before us, around the heavenly throne with our Lord. There with the angels we shall see Him face to face. Living in heaven will be the sweetest season of all! That is an event that we can all look forward to one day.

So, no matter what the season of life you are in as you read or hear this devotion, may you rejoice with the shepherds and remember all that you have seen and heard about Jesus and His

saving love. May you look forward to the best season of life that is to come: the one Jesus is waiting to celebrate with us in heaven.

Prayer: As a closing prayer, either sing or speak the words of “Angels We Have Heard on High,” LSB 368, LW 55, or “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” LSB 388, LW 504.

A Sweet Season

Written by Past LWML President Janice Wendorf, Neenah, Wisconsin

Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



The Sweet Gospel Message Bible Study

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, and pen/pencil.]

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are our Maker and Creator. We are sorry for our sins and for the times that we have rebelled against You. In Your great love for mankind, You planned our salvation by sending Your Son to be born, live a perfect life, suffer, die, and rise to life again. Because of the merits of our Savior, Jesus, and with faith generated by the Holy Spirit, we are saved and have faith in Christ. Please help us to tell the Good News of salvation in Jesus to those around us who need to hear His story – to tell what we have “heard and seen.” Be with us as we study Your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:20).

Christmas is a time when our senses are on high alert. The sweet tastes of candy canes, chocolates, cookies, and other baked goods are readily available for our enjoyment. In addition, the special music and sounds of the season are sweet and melodious to the ear, and the sights and brilliant lights are pleasing and seem to dance before our eyes. Share with your group a particular sweet memory from a past Christmas. _____

We hear the Christmas Gospel from Luke 2 every Christmas. Many of us might even have memorized all of it or part of it as a child in the children’s Christmas service. Read Luke 2:1–21 and as you read, listen for one new thing that you might not have heard before.

Faith Talk: Share with your group something new that you heard in Luke 2 and/or your favorite passage from this biblical account. _____

As a group, compile a list of possible sensory stimulants that might have accompanied the Christmas Gospel account.

Sounds: _____

Sights: _____

Sounds of glorifying and praise were to be heard from the shepherds in verse 20. What specifically had they *heard and seen*? _____

What?

Read the following Bible passages and determine **what** the message is that we have to tell.

Romans 3:23: _____

Philippians 2:1–11: _____

John 10:14–15 (Psalm 23): _____

John 14:6: _____

Acts 4:12: _____

Who?

Read the following Bible passages and determine **who** needs to hear the sweet message of the Gospel.

Mark 16:15: _____

John 3:16–17: _____

Acts 16:31–34: _____

1 Corinthians 1:23–24: _____

Ephesians 3:6: _____

How?

Read the following Bible passages and determine **how** we as believers can share the sweet message of the Gospel.

Acts 1:8: _____

John 1:41: _____

John 13:34–35: _____

Romans 10:13–15 (3 John 5–8): _____

1 Corinthians 1:1–9: _____

Ephesians 4:1–4: _____

Faith Talk: Read the Parable of the Lost Sheep recorded in Luke 15:4–7. Discuss with your group this statement: “He [Jesus] left the 99 to find me!” _____

Take a moment right now to write a sweet Gospel message that you have *heard and seen*, then share it with your group. _____

Outcomes

The Gospel message we have to share is indeed sweet. The Gospel message is not just “Good News,” it is the best news ever. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

Read Acts 14:1–6. As Paul and Barnabas shared the sweet Gospel message, what outcomes did they experience? _____

What outcomes have you experienced after sharing the truth of Jesus with others? _____

Jesus’ apostles experienced both positive and negative outcomes when they shared Jesus with people. As we share the sweet Gospel message, we will also experience these same outcomes. Read Isaiah 55:10–11. What assurance does God give us in these verses concerning the outcomes of our witnessing? _____

Closing Prayer: Please close by singing or praying the words to “I Love to Tell the Story:”

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.
I love to tell the story, because I know it’s true;
It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.

Refrain

I love to tell the story;
‘Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story, ‘tis pleasant to repeat
What seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard
The message of salvation from God's own holy Word. *Refrain*

I love to tell the story, For those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.
And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song,
“Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long. *Refrain* (Public Domain)

The Sweet Gospel Message
Written by Shari Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



The Sweet Gospel Message

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, and pen/pencil.]

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are our Maker and Creator. We are sorry for our sins and the times that we have rebelled against You. In Your great love for mankind, You planned our salvation by sending Your Son to be born, live a perfect life, suffer, die, and rise to life again. Because of the merits of our Savior, Jesus, and with faith generated by the Holy Spirit, we are saved and have faith in Christ. Please help us to tell the Good News of salvation in Jesus to those around us who need to hear His story – to tell what we have “heard and seen.” Be with us as we study Your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:20).

Christmas is a time when our senses are on high alert. The sweet tastes of candy canes, chocolates, cookies, and other baked goods are readily available for our enjoyment. In addition, the special music and sounds of the season are sweet and melodious to the ear, and the sights and brilliant lights are pleasing and seem to dance before our eyes. Share with your group a particular sweet memory from a past Christmas. Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group. The leader should give an example of her own to begin discussion.

We hear the Christmas Gospel from Luke 2 every Christmas. Many of us might even have memorized all of it or part of it as a child in the children’s Christmas service. Read Luke 2:1–21 and as you read, listen for one *new* thing that you might not have heard before.

Faith Talk: Share with your group something new that you heard in Luke 2 and/or your favorite passage from this biblical account. Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share.

As a group, compile a list of possible sensory stimulants that might have accompanied the Christmas Gospel account.

Sounds: Answers may vary but could include: angel voices, crowded city noises, sheep bleating, other animal noises, newborn baby’s cry, running feet, people talking, words and expressions of praise and amazement from the shepherds.

Sights: Answers may vary but could include: brilliant angels’ light, shepherds, sheep, animals, people, manger, newborn baby with mother and father, shepherds’ running footsteps.

Sounds of glorifying and praise were to be heard from the shepherds in verse 20. What specifically had they *heard and seen*? The shepherds heard the angelic proclamation that the Savior was born and where He could be found. They had also seen and heard a multitude of angels praising God. The shepherds saw the newborn Baby right where the angels had said He would be.

What?

Read the following Bible passages and determine **what** the Gospel message is that we have to tell.

Romans 3:23: All have sinned and need a Savior.

Philippians 2:1–11: This is a summary of what Jesus came to do to save us. Jesus Christ was conceived, born, lived a perfect life, suffered, died, and rose from the dead.

John 10:14–15 (Psalm 23): Jesus is our *Good Shepherd* who came to give His life for us, His sheep. He guides, leads, and protects us.

John 14:6: Jesus says, “*I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.* Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Acts 4:12: Salvation is found only through faith in Jesus.

Who?

Read the following Bible passages and determine **who** needs to hear the sweet message of the Gospel.

Mark 16:15: Everyone, everywhere needs to hear the Gospel.

John 3:16–17: Because of God’s great love for us, Jesus came to save everyone in the world.

Acts 16:31–34: Every family and household needs to hear the Good News of Jesus’ saving love.

1 Corinthians 1:23–24: Jews and Greeks need to hear the Gospel message.

Ephesians 3:6: Gentiles need to know that Jesus’ salvation is for them too.

How?

Read the following Bible passages and determine **how** we as believers can share the sweet message of the Gospel.

Acts 1:8: It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can share the sweet Gospel with others. The Holy Spirit gives us the plan to share and the words to say.

John 1:41: The Holy Spirit empowers us to tell the Good News of Jesus face-to-face with those in our family.

John 13:34–35: The Holy Spirit helps us to show the love of Jesus to one another through our words and our acts of service.

Romans 10:13–15 (3 John 5-8): When we send missionaries and support them, we share the Gospel in places we cannot physically go ourselves.

1 Corinthians 1:1–9: The Holy Spirit works through our pastors and church workers, and congregation members to share the message of salvation found in Christ alone.

Ephesians 4:1–4: God calls us to work together to spread the Gospel in all that we do.

Faith Talk: Read the Parable of the Lost Sheep recorded in Luke 15:4–7. Discuss with your group this statement: “He [Jesus] left the 99 to find me!” Answers will vary. Lead participants to see that Jesus came to save every individual from sin, death, and the devil.

Take a moment right now to write a sweet Gospel message that you have *heard and seen*, then share it with your group. Encourage everyone to take up pen or pencil and do this exercise.

Outcomes

The Gospel message we have to share is indeed sweet. The Gospel message is not just “Good News,” it is the best news ever. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

Read Acts 14:1–7. As Paul and Barnabas shared the sweet Gospel message, what outcomes did they experience? Paul and Barnabas experienced both positive and negative outcomes. As the Scripture account explains, ... a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed (v. 1). This positive outcome was then countered by a negative one: But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers (v. 2). With strength given them by the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas did not leave Iconium, but continued to speak boldly for the Lord (v. 3). The result of their continued witnessing was both positive and negative: But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles (v.4). Eventually, Paul and Barnabas had to leave Iconium when they learned that some wanted to stone them (vv.5–6). Despite this threat to their lives, Paul and Barnabas were not deterred in their mission for the Lord. In Lystra and Derbe, there they continued to preach the gospel (v.7).

What outcomes have you experienced after sharing the truth of Jesus with others? Encourage individuals to share both positive and negative outcomes of their personal witnessing. Emphasize that the mission that Jesus has given us is to tell others the Gospel. We only deliver the Good News. It is the Holy Spirit that brings people to faith in the Triune God.

Jesus’ apostles experienced both positive and negative outcomes when they shared Jesus with people. As we share the sweet Gospel message, we will also experience these same outcomes. Read Isaiah 55:10–11. What assurance does God give us in these verses concerning the outcomes of our witnessing? Isaiah 55:11 assures that the Word that God has given us to share will not return to Him empty, but is shall accomplish what God wants it to. “The Word always brings about what God wants done” (The Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, ©2009, study note on Isaiah 55:11, page 1182). Only the Holy Spirit knows whose hearts are touched and changed by the sweet Gospel message. The Holy Spirit encourages us to continue to share the Gospel no matter what the outcome might be.

Closing Prayer: Please close by singing or praying the words to “I Love to Tell the Story:”

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.
I love to tell the story, because I know it’s true;
It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.

Refrain

I love to tell the story;
‘Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story, 'tis pleasant to repeat
What seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard
The message of salvation from God's own holy Word. *Refrain*

I love to tell the story, For those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.
And when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long. *Refrain* (Public Domain)

The Sweet Gospel Message
Leader's Guide
Written by Shari Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Sweet Christmas Advent- Christmas Program

[Please provide: musical accompaniment, hymnals, copies of “I Love to Tell the Story” found at the end of this program for participants, copies of this program for the narrator, reader, and accompanist, samples of candy for use throughout the program, basket to place candy samples in to give away as a door prize at the end of the program. Option: purchase snack size candies and place in small bags to give as gifts to every attendee. If giving away candy samples, attach the Bible verse reference to each kind of candy as a reminder of how each relates to the Christmas story. Reproducible Bible verse reference tags are found at the end of the program.]

Note: If Rocky Road® candy bars are unavailable in your area, check online.

Narrator: Christmas can be a very sweet time of year. Aside from our kitchens being full of the wonderful smells of baking and all the holiday candy that comes along with it, the “sweetness” of Christmas is also found in the story of our Lord’s birth! Let’s sing about it.

All Sing: “I Love to Tell the Story”

I love to tell the story Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and His love,
I love to tell the story, Because I know it’s true;
It satisfies my longings, As nothing else would do,
Refrain: I love to tell the story; ‘Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story, ‘Tis pleasant to repeat
What seems each time I tell it, More wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story, For some have never heard
The message of salvation From God’s own holy Word.
Refrain: I love to tell the story, ‘Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love.

“I Love to Tell the Story,” Words by William G. Fischer and Music by Arabella K. Hankey, 1866. Public Domain.

Narrator: Christmas is part of the whole story of Jesus. Not only does the name of Jesus sound sweet to our ears (LSB 524), so does the story of His birth! He came to live the perfect life under God’s Law for us. He was the perfect sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. He rose again to give us eternal life! His birth was preceded by a journey on a ...

Narrator:

Rocky Road® (Hold up wrapped candy.)

There may not have been an actual “rocky road” between Nazareth and Bethlehem, but Mary was expecting and very close to her time of delivery. Making that journey must have been very difficult for her. Sometimes today, women are advised not to take long trips in a car or on a plane if they are close to giving birth. Imagine Mary as she took the trek to Bethlehem on foot or by donkey!

Reader: *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child (Luke 2:4-5).*

All Sing: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (LSB 361, TLH 647, LW 59)

Narrator:

Sugar Babies® (Hold up wrapped candy.)

This sweet candy reminds us of baby Jesus in the manger. God sent His only Son down from heaven in the form of a sweet little baby. This little child would grow up to change history and our world and save us from our sin.

Reader: *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).*

All Sing: “Away In A Manger” (LSB 364, LW 64)

Narrator:

Candy Cane (Hold up wrapped candy.)

The candy cane reminds us of the staff the shepherds used as they took care of their sheep while the baby Jesus was being born. God chose to reveal the birth of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, (John 10:11) to these ordinary shepherds as they were going about their business, not yet knowing all that Jesus, the Good Shepherd would do for them!

Reader: *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear (Luke 2:8-9).*

Narrator:

Almond Joy® (Hold up wrapped candy.)

While the shepherds were watching their sheep they were told that the Christ was born! “Christ” is the Greek word for the Hebrew word, “Messiah.” Imagine the shepherds’ joy over getting to meet their Savior after so many years of waiting! Waiting nine months for a baby to be born doesn’t even compare to waiting thousands of years! It certainly was “*good news of great joy*” (Luke 2:10) for everyone!

Reader: *And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:10-12).*

All Sing: “Angels We Have Heard on High” (TLH 368, LW 55)

Narrator:

Dove® (Hold up wrapped candy.)

The dove has been used as a symbol of peace throughout history. Christ was born to bring us peace with God and with one another as we trust in Him.

Reader: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).*

Narrator: Jesus said:

Reader: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid"* (John 14:27).

Narrator: The prophet Isaiah said of Jesus 700 years before His birth:

Reader: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; . . . and his name shall be called . . . Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6).

Narrator: Luke 2:13-14 says:

Reader: *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

All Sing: "Angels From the Realms of Glory" (LSB 367, TLH 136, LW 50)

Narrator:

Milky Way® (Hold up wrapped candy.)

God Himself told the story of Jesus, the promised Savior, to Abraham some two thousand years before Jesus was born. Genesis 15:5 says [the LORD] *brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be."* Jesus would be one of Abraham's descendants! The sweet story of Jesus continued as *"wise men from the east"* (Matthew 2:1) followed a special star God placed in the Milky Way which led them to the Savior.

Reader: *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him"* (Matthew 2:1-2).

Narrator:

Starburst® (Hold up wrapped candy.)

The wise men, astrologers of Christ's day, sought the Lord. Why? The Holy Spirit guided them by a star, giving them faith to look for Jesus. When the wise men saw the star, they *rejoiced* (Matthew 2:10). The Christmas star reminds us that Jesus is *the light of the world* (John 8:12). Like the wise men, we, too, rejoice in the birth of the newborn King!

Reader: *After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy* (Matthew 2:9-10).

All Sing: "As with Gladness Men of Old" (LSB 397, TLH 127, LW 75)

Narrator:

Hershey's Treasures® (Hold up wrapped candy.)

The Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to the wise men and created faith so that they would search for Him, follow Him, and worship Him! The wise men worshiped Jesus by giving Him treasures. For centuries, this action of gift-giving has continued as a tradition connected with the Christmas celebration. However, giving gifts is not only for Christmas. It's also about daily giving Jesus our time, talents, and other things in service to Him and to others. We want everyone to know that

Jesus is the greatest gift and that He is their Lord and Savior. Then they, too, can bask in the sweetness of His forgiveness of sins!

Reader: *And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh* (Matthew 2:11).

Narrator:

Riesen® (pronounced “reason”) (Hold up wrapped candy.)

This candy spelled R-I-E-S-E-N has two R-E-A-S-O-N-S to be mentioned. First, from Jesus’ perspective WE are the reason for the season! Jesus came to earth because of our sins. He lived, died, and rose again so that we could live with Him forever! Second, from *our* faith perspective, Jesus is the reason for the season! Our lives have new meaning and purpose as we trust in His Person and in His work for our salvation. As we worship Him, serve Him, and tell others about Him, Jesus is our “reason” for this and every sweet season!

Reader: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

All sing: “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds” (vv. 1–4) (LSB 524, TLH 364, LW 279)

Sweet Christmas

Written by Barbara Schaer, Gordon, Nebraska

Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019

I Love to Tell the Story

I love to tell the story Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and His love,
I love to tell the story, Because I know it's true;
It satisfies my longings, As nothing else would do,
Refrain: I love to tell the story; 'Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story, 'Tis pleasant to repeat
What seems each time I tell it, More wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story, For some have never heard
The message of salvation From God's own holy Word.
Refrain: I love to tell the story, 'Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love.

"I Love to Tell the Story," Words by William G. Fischer and Music by Arabella K. Hankey, 1866. Public Domain.

Bible Verse Tags for Candy Samples

Rocky Road®

Luke 2:4–5

Sugar Babies®

Luke 2:7

Candy Cane

Luke 2:8–9

Almond Joy®

Luke 2:10–12

Dove®

Isaiah 9:6

Milky Way®

Matthew 2:1–2

Starburst®

Matthew 2:9–10

Hershey's Treasures®

Matthew 2:11

Reisen®

John 3:16



BALANCING ACT

Devotion

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

An email arrives. "Can you bring cookies or other nibbles to the coffee hour next Sunday?"

A text message dings. "Could you help out by taking my son to soccer practice? I have a dentist appointment."

The phone rings. "We need volunteers to canvass your neighborhood sometime in the next two weeks. We need donations for the homeless shelter."

Your calendar is already full. After all, you do have your own husband and children (or grandchildren) to take care of. It's your turn to lead this week's women's Bible study. You've promised a good friend to help her pick out new furniture for her den. Your family wants to see that new movie this weekend. Then there's your own appointment to get that needed haircut. What's more, you promised yourself that you would go for a walk at least every other day!

How can you manage all of this? After all, there is not a single item on that list that is wrong or wasteful. Can you make more hours or more days to accomplish it all? Of course not! God gives each of us 24 hours each day and seven days each week. How then can you balance all that is required?

Take a deep breath. Ask for God to fill you with calmness and peace. Recall Psalm 37:7a, *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.*

Ask yourself if you have taken the time to be quiet before Him. Have you read and meditated on His Word? Have you talked to God about your choices, your time, and your activities? The Holy Spirit leads us to make our top priority time in God's Word and in prayer. The guidance God graciously gives us through His Word helps us to balance our busy lives so that we might live according to His will. God promises us that *we can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens us* (Philippians 4:13).

Let your decisions, your priorities, your yes and your no be guided by God's will for you. May all that we do bring glory to God.

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for caring for all Your children. We are thankful that our lives are filled with family, friends, and opportunities and that the skills given by You are needed by others as we serve them in love. Give us Your guidance as we prioritize our time. Give us the wisdom to seek Your will in all that we do. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Balancing Act

*Written by Past LWML President Gloria Edwards, Portola Valley, California
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019*



Balancing Life's Challenges

Bible study

[Please provide: hymnals, Bibles, pens or pencils, and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Opening: Sing "Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me" (verses 1-3) LSB 722, LW 512

Prayer: (*pray together*) Lord, we come before You with humble hearts, and we ask that Your Presence be here with us. You are our life source, and You promise that Your Word will do what You send it to do. Work in us now as we contemplate life's balancing act, the necessity of balancing time spent with You with the demands of life here on this earth. We ask that You work in us a cheerful heart to serve others that they may see You in all that we do. In our Savior Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Balancing Acts Of Four Women

Woman 1:

Our first woman's story serves as an example of the variety of choices and everyday challenges many women face. She is a young married mom of two young children. One of her children has Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and needs nebulizer treatments at specific intervals. Because of this, and because she sleeps with an ear open to hear any sounds coming from her son's room, she is exhausted. To further challenge her, she works the early shift at her job, so she must rise daily at 5:30 a.m. She is a supervisor at her job and deals with stressful situations on a regular basis. Because of the stress, she makes certain she exercises daily. When she gets off work, she picks up one child at school and the other from daycare. Then she makes a nutritious supper for her family. When the yard needs to be mown, she does that. After supper, she posts on her "business-on-the-side" website. At church, she is a member of the LWML and volunteers to help serve refreshments for fellowship time.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? _____

Woman 2:

Our second woman, in her mid-fifties, has been the main caretaker for her mom for 23 years. Her mom now requires more care, and her dad needs help to remember to take his medications and to take care of their finances. They reside on a farm and raise beef cattle. Our second woman also works in town three and a half days a week in a work environment that can be volatile. She has sacrificed many of her own needs to care for her parents. She lives exhausted most of the time, but her love for her parents and for her Lord spurs her on each day.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? _____

Woman 3:

Like Woman 2, our third woman is also a caretaker for her mom who has dealt for decades with difficulties resulting from a severe stroke. Two of her adult children face challenging marriages and the third is angry with her because she did not join her at an important doctor's appointment for her daughter. In addition, her house needs to be cleaned, the laundry basket is overflowing, the garden needs to be weeded, and produce must be canned. Her children and grandchildren have school activities that she wants to attend, and she wants to make time to teach them God's word. Her husband is a pastor who has led five funerals in the past three weeks and he definitely needs her support and encouragement as he cares for grieving family members. This woman also serves the Lord in many ways in her congregation, including making compassionate care visits to families. The families she visits are dealing with a variety of losses.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? _____

Woman 4:

A fourth woman's life chronicles other challenges. Both she and her husband are elderly. It seems that about all of their outings are for doctor appointments. Their bodies don't work like they used to, and their days are filled with aches and pains. Everything takes much longer to do than before. They both need medication, extra care, medical equipment, and a lot of fortitude. Their mental faculties are slipping and they are concerned that they may have to give up their drivers' licenses. They may even need to move into a different living situation. Financial concerns are real.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? _____

Each of these women face different challenges. What about you? Jot down some challenges and situations which you are currently trying to balance in your life. If you feel comfortable, share these with your group.

How does balancing these challenges make you feel physically? _____

_____ Emotionally? _____

How have these challenges affected your walk with God? _____

We Live Lives Of Busyness

We live crazy, busy lives filled with others' needs and desires, our own needs and preferences, church and community needs and opportunities, ministry choices and challenges, political turmoil, and the list goes on. Too often we find ourselves gridlocked by activities and schedules. When the busyness gets out of hand, we feel frazzled, trapped, fatigued, and even ineffective. We may lose sight and control of what we believe should be priorities in our lives. Our mental, spiritual and physical health may even decline and suffer.

How in control of your schedule are you? _____

At this time, are you able to balance your priorities? Why or why not? _____

Voluntary Commitments

Some "demands" of life are voluntary. We choose to serve in areas we enjoy, with the gifts God has lavished upon us. What opportunities are you involved in by choice? List them and share with your group. If service in these areas is fulfilling for you, tell your group why.

Uninvited Invasions

At other times, life's challenges invade our lives uninvited. Death, an incurable disease, health issues like a stroke or heart attack, the loss of a job, a financial crisis, a divorce, family friction, abuse, strained relationships, a geographical move, and the like force us to serve in new and demanding ways. Hurricanes, floods, fires, tornados, earthquakes, and other disasters smack us in the face and render us helpless, at least for a time.

Which involuntary realities/demands in life are affecting you negatively, and why? _____

It's not easy to balance the challenges in our lives so that we can keep our most important priorities front and center. All of us have our own ideas and goals with regards to how we want to live and serve. All of us are also faced with the unexpected. Our life in service to others in God's kingdom is just as valid and necessary as our spending time in God's word and in prayer. Many other facets of our lives including taking care of our families and homes and working at jobs outside the home are also a part of Christian living. Instead of a matter of what *ought to* be done, the issue becomes, what is *possible*? Since our humanity limits us, reality begs the questions, "What *can* we do, and what must we leave undone? What are our prime responsibilities and what are our limitations?"

God Helps Us Keep Our Balance

In His Word, God offers us cautions and directions so that we can balance life's challenges in ways that glorify Him.

Read Matthew 13:15a and Galatians 5:16–21. What can happen to us when balancing life's challenges disconnects us from our life source, Jesus? _____

Read Exodus 20:1-8. How do God's first three commandments guide us as we balance life's challenges? _____

According to the Scripture references below, what promises does God give us to encourage and help us in our daily balancing acts?

Isaiah 41:10 _____

Isaiah 43:1–3a _____

Philippians 4:6–7 _____

1 John 2:15–17 _____

Which of these promises encourage you and give you hope? Why? _____

Relief, Rescue, And Redemption

We need not be knocked off balance by life's challenges, invasions and busyness. God gives us His Word as well as His means of grace (Holy Baptism, Holy Communion) to keep our focus on Him.

As you seek to balance the challenges in your life, how can each of these truths from God's Word keep your focus on God and on His gracious will and work for you despite your missteps?

Psalms 37:3–8: _____

Proverbs 30:5: _____

Psalms 119:9–16: _____

Isaiah 35:4: _____

Matthew 6:25–34: _____

Matthew 11:28: _____

Matthew 28:20b: _____

John 15:5–12: _____

1 Corinthians 10:31: _____

1 Corinthians 11:23b–26: _____

Ephesians 4:32-5:2: _____

Titus 3:5–7: _____

Read Romans 8:31–32, 35–38. Whatever challenges may come your way, on what can you be certain when you trust in Jesus as your risen Lord and Savior? _____

Look back at the challenges faced by the four women at the beginning of this study. What truths from the Bible that you've explored today could you share with each of these women to help them balance the challenges they face? _____

God, in His grace for us in Christ Jesus, enables and empowers us to learn, practice, and change. This does not depend upon our resolve. Instead, it is sealed in the redemptive work of Jesus. What a wondrous gift He gives us! May the Holy Spirit continue to work in you to do God's will.

Closing Prayer: Merciful God, Help us to make You our priority, even in the midst of life's busyness. Help us daily to set aside time to read Your Scriptures and to pour out our hearts to You in prayer. Empower us, by Your Holy Spirit, to believe Your promises and to carry out Your commands. Work in us a willingness to share Jesus with our family, our neighbors, our community, and our world. We pray all this in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen

Sing: "Fight the Good Fight," (verses 1-4) LSB 664, TLH 447, LW 299

Balancing Life's Challenges
Written by Vickie Emery, Osmond, Nebraska
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Balancing Life's Challenges

Bible study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: hymnals, Bibles, pens or pencils, and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Opening: Sing "Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me" (verses 1-3) LSB 722, LW 512

Prayer: (*pray together*) Lord, we come before You with humble hearts, and we ask that Your Presence be here with us. You are our life source, and You promise that Your Word will do what You send it to do. Work in us now as we contemplate life's balancing act, the necessity of balancing time spent with You with the demands of life here on this earth. And we ask that You work in us a cheerful heart to serve others that they may see You in all that we do. In our Savior Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Balancing Acts Of Four Women

Woman 1:

Our first woman's story serves as an example of the variety of choices and everyday challenges many women face. She is a young married mom of two young children. One of her children has Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and needs nebulizer treatments at specific intervals. Because of this, and because she sleeps with an ear open to hear any sounds coming from her son's room, she is exhausted. To further challenge her, she works the early shift at her job, so she must rise daily at 5:30 a.m. She is a supervisor at her job and deals with stressful situations on a regular basis. Because of the stress, she makes certain she exercises daily. When she gets off work, she picks up one child at school and the other from daycare. Then she makes a nutritious supper for her family. When the yard needs to be mown, she does that. After supper, she posts on her "business-on-the-side" website. At church, she is a member of the LWML and volunteers to help serve refreshments for fellowship time.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? This woman has two children to care for, one of whom has special health needs. She also works outside the home in a stressful job. She lacks sleep. She strives to find time to exercise. She has many household chores. She is an LWML member and volunteers as a refreshment server at church.

Woman 2:

Our second woman, in her mid-fifties, has been the main caretaker for her mom for 23 years. Her mom now requires more care, and her dad needs help to remember to take his medications and to take care of their finances. They reside on a farm and raise beef cattle. Our second woman also works in town three and a half days a week in a work environment that can be volatile. She has sacrificed many of her own needs to care for her parents. She lives exhausted most of the time, but her love for her parents and for her Lord spurs her on each day.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? Woman two is a caretaker for her parents. She works outside the home three days a week in a volatile work environment. She is often exhausted.

Woman 3:

Like Woman 2, our third woman is also a caretaker for her mom who has dealt for decades with difficulties resulting from a severe stroke. Two of her adult children face challenging marriages and the third is angry with her because she did not join her at an important doctor's appointment for her daughter. In addition, her house needs to be cleaned, the laundry basket is overflowing, the garden needs to be weeded, and produce must be canned. Her children and grandchildren have school activities that she wants to attend, and she wants to make time to teach them God's word. Her husband is a pastor who has led five funerals in the past three weeks and he definitely needs her support and encouragement as he cares for grieving family members. This woman also serves the Lord in many ways in her congregation, including making compassionate care visits to families. The families she visits are dealing with a variety of losses.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? This woman takes care of her mother who has health difficulties. She is dealing with tough situations with her adult children. She has household chores. She has school activities to attend for her children and grandchildren. She is a pastor's wife who knows her husband needs her support and encouragement. She visits grieving families in her congregation.

Woman 4:

A fourth woman's life chronicles other challenges. Both she and her husband are elderly. It seems that about all of their outings are for doctor appointments. Their bodies don't work like they used to, and their days are filled with aches and pains. Everything takes much longer to do than before. They both need medication, extra care, medical equipment, and a lot of fortitude. Their mental faculties are slipping and they are concerned that they may have to give up their drivers' licenses. They may even need to move into a different living situation. Financial concerns are real.

What does this woman have to balance in her life? This woman and her husband face health and aging challenges. They may have to give up their freedom to drive places on their own. They may have to move to a different living situation. They also have financial concerns.

Each of these women face different challenges. What about you? Jot down some challenges and situations which you are currently trying to balance in your life. If you feel comfortable, share these with your group. Other challenges participants may face include job losses, adult children living with them at home, cancer and other health issues, loss of a spouse, re-entering the workforce. Encourage those who feel comfortable sharing their challenges with the group to do so.

How does balancing these challenges make you feel physically? Responses may include exhaustion, tension headaches and stomach aches, insomnia, lack of appetite or overeating due to challenges. Emotionally? Responses may include angry, depressed, sad, distracted, or impatient.

How have these challenges affected your walk with God? Responses may range from being drawn closer to God and their dependence on Him to neglecting worship and time in God's Word.

We Live Lives Of Busyness

We live crazy, busy lives filled with others' needs and desires, our own needs and preferences, church and community needs and opportunities, ministry choices and challenges, political turmoil, and the list goes on. Too often we find ourselves gridlocked by activities and schedules. When the busyness gets out of hand, we feel frazzled, trapped, fatigued, and even ineffective. We may lose sight and control of what we believe should be priorities in our lives. Our mental, spiritual and physical health may even decline and suffer.

How in control of your schedule are you? Allow participants a chance to share. Responses will depend upon how much of their schedule is of their own making or is set by the needs of others.

At this time, are you able to balance your priorities? Why or why not? Encourage willing participants to share their balancing experiences.

Voluntary Commitments

Some 'demands' of life are voluntary. We choose to serve in areas we enjoy, with the gifts God has lavished upon us. What opportunities are you involved in by choice? List them and share with your group. If service in these areas is fulfilling for you, tell your group why. Participants' responses will likely include both church-related service and school or community volunteer commitments.

Uninvited Invasions

At other times, life's challenges invade our lives uninvited. Death, an incurable disease, health issues like a stroke or heart attack, the loss of a job, a financial crisis, a divorce, family friction, abuse, strained relationships, a geographical move, and the like force us to serve in new and demanding ways. Hurricanes, floods, fires, tornados, earthquakes, and other disasters smack us in the face and render us helpless, at least for a time.

Which involuntary realities/demands in life are affecting you negatively, and why? Encourage participants to share some of the uninvited and unexpected challenges they currently face.

It's not easy to balance the challenges in our lives so that we can keep our most important priorities front and center. All of us have our own ideas and goals regarding how we want to live and serve. All of us are also faced with the unexpected. Our life in service to others in God's kingdom is just as valid and necessary as our spending time in God's word and in prayer. Many other facets of our lives including taking care of our families and homes and working at jobs outside the home are also a part of Christian living. Instead of a matter of what *ought to* be done, the issue becomes, what is *possible*? Since our humanity limits us, reality begs the questions, "What *can* we do, and what must we leave undone? What are our prime responsibilities and what are our limitations?"

God Helps Us Keep Our Balance

In His Word, God offers us cautions and directions so that we can balance life's challenges in ways that glorify Him.

Read Matthew 13:15a and Galatians 5:16–21. What can happen to us when balancing life's challenges disconnects us from our life source, Jesus? Matthew 13:15 warns that we may close our eyes and ears to what God wants to tell us. Our hearts may become dull as we no longer seek the will of God in our lives. Galatians 5:16–21 lists the desires of the flesh that can take over our lives when we disconnect from God. These include fleshly desires, sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, strife, jealousy, and anger.

Read Exodus 20:1-8. How do God's first three commandments guide us as we balance life's challenges? In The First Commandment of His Law, God reminds us to put Him first above anything else. The Second Commandment reminds us not to misuse God's name, but rather to "call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, CPH, ©2017, p. 67. In The Third Commandment, God reminds us of the importance of the Sabbath day as a time set aside "to worship and to ponder the power and goodness of God in His work of creation [as well as] the graciousness of God's work of redemption." (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, CPH, ©2017, pp. 74–75. This commandment warns us "not to despise or neglect worship or to reject or disregard God's Word." God wants us to "treasure His Word as sacred and to devote ourselves to His Word (in private devotion and public worship)." (Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, CPH, ©2017, pp. 75–76.

According to the Scripture references below, what promises does God give us to encourage and help us in our daily balancing acts?

Isaiah 41:10: God promises to strengthen us, help us, and to uphold us.

Isaiah 43:1–3a: God has redeemed us. We belong to Him. He promises to protect us from danger.

Philippians 4:6–7: God invites us to come to Him in prayer with all of our concerns. He promises to give our hearts peace in Jesus, our Savior.

1 John 2:15–17: The world and the things in it are temporary. Those who love the world do not love God. But whoever "does the will of God abides forever (v. 17).

Which of these promises encourage you and give you hope? Why? Provide ample time for participants to share.

Relief, Rescue, And Redemption

We need not be knocked off balance by life's challenges, invasions and busyness. God gives us His Word as well as His means of grace (Holy Baptism, Holy Communion) to keep our focus on Him.

As you seek to balance the challenges in your life, how can each of these truths from God's Word keep your focus on God and on His gracious will and work for you despite your missteps?

Psalms 37:3–8: When we trust in God and commit our way to Him, He promises to give us what we desire according to His will for us and to act on our behalf. Trusting in God means that we wait patiently for His response as well as refrain from anger and worry.

Proverbs 30:5: God's Word is truth and we can trust in it. God shields us from troubles and dangers.

Psalms 119:9–16: Following God's Word keeps our way pure and helps us to know what is sinful. When we are in the Word, our focus is on our Triune God. This focus brings us joy.

Isaiah 35:4: We do not have to be afraid for God has saved us through Jesus and will guard and protect us.

Matthew 6:25–34: God values us more than anything He has created. He promises to take care of all our needs.

Matthew 11:28: In Jesus, we find rest from all of our difficult life challenges. We can trust in His power and strength because He died and rose to save us from our sins.

Matthew 28:20b: We are never alone for Jesus promises to be with us always.

John 15:5–12: Jesus is the "vine" and we are the "branches" (v. 5). Those who have faith in Him will bear much fruit" (v. 5)—good works done in Jesus' name. Our God loves us and commands us to love others as He loves us.

1 Corinthians 10:31: Whatever we do, God directs us to do it to His glory.

1 Corinthians 11:23b–26: Whenever we partake of The Lord's Supper, we remember and proclaim Jesus' death for our sins. Through this means of grace, God forgives our sins and strengthens us to live for Him.

Ephesians 4:32-5:2: Be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving ...as God in Christ forgave you (v. 32). Imitate God and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us (v. 2). God works in us to help us to show this kind of sacrificial love to others.

Titus 3:5–7: We have been saved from eternal death through Holy Baptism. Daily God forgives us and renews us so that we may follow Him and His will for our lives.

Read Romans 8:31–32, 35–38. Whatever challenges may come your way, on what can you be certain when you trust in Jesus as your risen Lord and Savior? We can be certain that God always loves us and that there is no challenge that can separate us from His love for us in Christ Jesus.

Look back at the challenges faced by the four women at the beginning of this study. What truths from the Bible that you've explored today could you share with each of these women to help them balance the challenges they face? Allow time for participants to share.

God, in His grace for us in Christ Jesus, enables and empowers us to learn, practice, and change. This does not depend upon our resolve. Instead, it is sealed in the redemptive work of Jesus. What a wondrous gift He gives us! May the Holy Spirit continue to work in you to do God's will.

Closing Prayer: Merciful God, help us to make You our priority, even in the midst of life's busyness. Help us daily to set aside time to read Your Scriptures and to pour out our hearts to You in prayer. Empower us, by Your Holy Spirit, to believe Your promises and to carry out Your

commands. Work in us a willingness to share Jesus with our family, our neighbors, our community, and our world. We pray all this in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen

Sing: "Fight the Good Fight," (verses 1-4) LSB 664, TLH 447, LW 299

Balancing Life's Challenges
Leader's Guide

Written by Vickie Emery, Osmond, Nebraska
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Our God is a God of Life Responsive Reading

[Please provide: a copy of this responsive reading for all participants]

Leader: Triune God, we come to You today in thankfulness for the human life that You create, redeem, grow, and sustain.

All: Jesus, You tell us in Your Word, *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly* (John 10:10b).

Leader: Heavenly Father, *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them* (Psalm 139:16). God, our finite minds cannot comprehend this. Yet, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we believe that this is true.

All: Lord God, *You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb, I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made* (Psalm 139:13–14a). You know when every act of conception occurs. Every life is precious to You.

Leader: God of all creation, human life is so much more to You than just a physical body. You care immensely about every aspect of who we are. While You bless us with bodies with skin and bones and organs, You also bless us with minds that learn, hearts that love and care, as well as with souls. You care so much about us that You sent Your one and only Son, Jesus, to save us from the eternal damnation we deserve because of our sins.

All: Jesus, *You bore our sins in [Your] body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness* (1 Peter 2:24). You rose from the dead so that we, through faith in You, have the sure and certain promise of eternal life. Your words reassure us of this truth, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die"* (John 11:25–26). You also say, *"Because I live, you also will live"* (John 14:19b).

Leader: God of all life, You know that some in our society do not value life the way that You intend. Abortion threatens life in the womb. Hate leads to bloodshed and death. People attempt to define who is worthy of life and who is not, whether it's an unborn child, a person with developmental disabilities, or the aged. Forgive us for the times we have not valued every life the way that You do. By the power of the Holy Spirit, give us compassionate hearts that forgive others. Give us caring hearts that want to serve and help all in need. Give us voices that joyfully tell the truth that eternal life is found only through faith in You.

All: Help us, dear Father, to live as Jesus lived with love for all. By the power of the Holy Spirit, *may all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from [us] along with all malice. May we be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave [us]* (Ephesians 4:31–32).

Leader: Help us, God, to stand up for human life. Help us to remember that from the moment of conception, life matters. Help us to remember that in all stages of our lives on this earthly

journey, life matters. Help us to remember that life is not ours to take, but is a gift given to us by You. Help us to proclaim that Jesus came so that we might have abundant life, now and in eternity. We pray together:

All: Thank You, God, for giving us life, both physical and eternal. Thank You for Your Word that reminds us that You planned every day of our lives even before we began to breathe. Thank You for The Word, Jesus, who died and rose again so that we might have new eternal lives through the faith You give us when we are baptized and through the faith you strengthen in us through Holy Communion. By the power of the Holy Spirit, lead us to regard, preserve, and proclaim human life as Your very precious gift. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Our God is a God of Life

Based on ideas submitted by: Susan Sweatman, Trout Creek, Montana

Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



FINDING HIDDEN TALENTS

Devotion

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10).

As their pastor, I serve a congregation which includes many people with special needs of mind, body, and soul. Each of these people is unique, with his or her own needs and challenges, strengths, and abilities. They are the “normal” members of our congregation. We also minister to a large community of people with developmental disabilities, each one unique, with her or his own abilities and strengths, challenges and needs. Each has their own God-given gifts and talents. Many of these talents and gifts are quite obvious. Many are, well, surprises!

Three weeks after my family and I arrived at our new congregation, twenty-four year ago, we held a Christmas gathering for more than 250 people with developmental disabilities and their care-givers. This gathering was complete with a nativity pageant with characters played by those with disabilities, an angel choir (it was, in its own way, glorious) a Christmas dinner, served to each attendee, and Santa and his helpers who distributed a gift, specially chosen for each person by members of our congregation. It was, and continues to be, a beautiful part of Christmas.

However, that first Christmas gathering was quite troubling for our seven-year-old daughter and, therefore, also for her parents. “Papa,” she said with tears streaming, “that man keeps watching me and following me.” She was so right. As she stayed closely by my side for the rest of the evening, the man did watch and he did follow. This kind of ministry, at that moment in time, didn’t feel like such a good thing.

God, in His Word, encourages *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:10)*. Each and every one of us, God’s children, “normal” people and people with special needs, is gifted by God with talents to be put to work in loving service of others, as we wisely employ the amazing variety of abilities which He, so freely and lovingly, pours into us. Whew!

What a joy it is to see the excitement of those with disabilities as they acolyte the candles, or usher the offerings, or lector the assigned lessons, or play the hymns on the piano (sometimes by ear), or anthem with the angel choir in worship. For others with special needs, using their talent includes singing karaoke (“The Lord’s Prayer” or “Your Cheatin’ Heart”), dancing high-stepping dances alone or with others, calling bingo numbers, or helping to serve and eat the refreshments and goodies for an evening gathering.

God has given to us, His church, the opportunity and call to help each and every person discover and unwrap the gifts and mine and develop the talents that He has spread in the hearts and lives of His people. He has graciously awarded these gifts and talents for the building up of the church, to provide a way for individuals to respond to His gift of a Savior, to affirm that our faith in Jesus is living, and to give those who do not yet believe an opportunity to see the love of Christ at work in our midst and into the world. Again, whew!

Did I mention surprises? Because these talents and gifts are not always obvious but often hidden, particularly in those with special needs, there are indeed, sometimes, heart-touching eureka discoveries to be revealed when seeking and encouraging people to use their God-provided gift-treasures.

Days after that troubling first Christmas party for our folks with developmental disabilities, we learned that the man watching and following was a truly nice, very quiet person, whose little sister, living in another city, looked just like our daughter. We and she had no reason to ever worry about him.

There was yet another epiphany to be discovered as we headed out the entryway of our church building following that Christmas party. "Papa, look!" our daughter squealed with delight. There, at the feet of our Sears and Roebuck catalog nearly life-sized statue of Jesus, someone, with the gift and talent of helping and caring, had served a plate of food for his or her Savior, who was born on the first Nativity, suffered and died on Good Friday, and rose again on the first Easter, to serve and to save us all! How's that for being a *good steward of God's varied grace?*

Closing Prayer: Gracious, generous God, thank You for the innumerable gifts, talents, and abilities which You pour out on all Your people! By the power and working of the Holy Spirit, help us, Your church, to discover and unwrap their gifts and mine and develop the talents which You have provided for the benefit of Your people and for Your own glory. Especially we praise You for the gift of Your Son, our Savior Jesus, for all that He has done for us for our salvation, and for all the good things He continues to do in our lives. In the Name of that Son, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Finding Hidden Talents
Written by Rev. Larry A. Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Mining Hidden Talents Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study for participants, Bibles, and hymnals]

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10).

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You have wonderfully created each one of us. You have given every person gifts and talents to be used to serve You and to serve one another. As we study Your Word today, open our eyes to those individuals around us who have special physical and learning needs. Help us to see these individuals as You do, with love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

The people whom God has made to live in this world are physically and intellectually different from one another. But we all have one similarity: we are all born sinful and are in need of a Savior (Romans 3:22b–23). God sent Jesus to rescue and redeem us from our sinful condition through His death and resurrection. Through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit works to bring us to faith in the Triune God and to keep us in that faith for eternity. Once God has incorporated us into His family of faith, He uses each and every one of us to share His Word, His love, and His mercy. Galatians 3:26–28 reminds us: *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* There is no difference in God's eyes when He looks at us. We are *all one in Christ Jesus*.

Those of you who are familiar with the mining industry know that mining is hard work. It takes lots of time, patience, care, and persistence to mine the treasured gems in God's creation. This is also true when mining hidden talents in those people around you who are also God's creation. When we mine hidden talents in people, we don't use drills, pick-axes, or dynamite as coal or gem miners do. Instead, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we use loving patience. As does everyone who God has created, individuals with special learning and physical needs also have unique gifts which God has given them. To mine their talents may take a little more patience and perseverance, but as you will see from the people we are about to meet, the effort will yield treasured blessings. Let's meet some very special people and take a look at how they are using to God's glory the talents He has given them that have been "mined" from within them.

Paula

First, let's meet Paula. Paula lived in a group home with eight other adults with developmental challenges. Paula was always happy, quiet, and busy. At times, she was also a peacemaker among her fellow housemates. Once after an evening visit, Paula came to me as I was leaving and shared with me some words of wisdom. She said, "I've really been praying for Betty, (a fellow housemate), but it isn't working." As I hugged Paula, I told her, "Just keep praying!"

Read Philippians 4:4–9 and list some of the qualities that Paul mentions, which Paula mirrored in her life.

How did Paula use her talents for her Savior? _____

Reflect: Is there a “Paula” in your congregation who is unable to get out and who can use her hidden talent to pray for others?

Robert

Robert, too, was a “special” child of God who lived in a group home. He had spent most of his life in the care of others because when he was born “different” his parents were told it would be best for him to be “put away” for he would never be able to live an independent life. However, someone forgot to tell that to Robert. Robert was a happy, talkative, caring individual. Even though he faced physical and mental challenges, Robert was a natural greeter. With the help of his caregivers, each Sunday Robert was at the doors of the church before anyone else. He had a big smile and shared it with everyone who came through the doors. He would approach each worshipper with the greeting, “Hi, my name is Robert—what is yours? Did you come to worship my Jesus?” To some, Robert was different—not at all the person you would expect to greet worshippers. But to Jesus, Robert was a wonderful missionary. He gave glory to his Savior as he welcomed people to church without hesitating to share with them his love for his Lord Jesus.

Read Romans 15:7. How are we to welcome others? _____

Our Lord Jesus is the expert miner of hidden talents. Name some of the individuals others did not consider worthy whom Jesus called to faith and whose talents He utilized. _____

Jesus has rescued us all from the most unworthy position possible. His death and resurrection delivers us all from the disability of sin, from eternal death, and from the devil’s heinous plans. But even though in the eyes of Jesus, we are loved and cherished, we often see those with differences and with mental and physical challenges as less than we are. What is it that can make us blind to the talents of those with special needs?

For what can you ask God in prayer to help you better see the worth and talents of others?

Reflect: Are there members of your congregation, who like Robert, are full of the love of Jesus, but do not fit the picture or mold we have to be greeters or to serve in other meaningful ways? Maybe it is time to “mine” their talents for Jesus’ work.

Keith

Keith struggled in all his classes. Reading and any subject that required reading were sometimes more than he could bear. He wanted so much to fit in and be part of the class. During class discussions, Keith sat quietly. His special needs made him feel like an outsider looking in. His classmates and teacher tried to help him. His teacher spent one-on-one time each day with Keith as the rest of the class did their assigned work. It took a little “mining”, but she discovered that Keith loved art and was very good at it. Keith’s teacher then began to give

him special assignments where he could use his artistic talents. Keith beamed when he could turn in an assignment at the same time as his classmates. He soon became the program designer for special school activities. When we would have art as a class, Keith became the “teacher”—helping others with his talent, patiently showing them time and time again how to draw or create wonderful artwork.

Read Ephesians 4:2. According to this verse, how are we to accept others? _____

How did Keith’s teacher use the wisdom from Ephesians 4:2 to mine his artistic talent? _____

How might you use this wisdom as you encourage all people, including those with special needs, to uncover and share the talents with which God has blessed them? _____

Reflect: Just as God gave Keith the gift of art to share, He gives everyone a special talent. Do you have a Keith in your congregation who loves to express himself through art? Have you taken advantage of such talent from individuals who are not the typical “artists”? Is it time to do some “mining” to discover the hidden talents which lay beneath the surface just waiting for a chance to be shared?

Carol

Almost every Sunday morning, Carol sat in church a few pews behind me. As a young child, I could not figure out why she would always have a hymnal in her hand and would always sing with us, yet her words never matched ours. She never seemed to be singing the same thing we were. I even heard some adults in church try to tell her not to sing, but Carol loved Jesus and loved singing. Carol was a “special” child of God who not only had learning challenges, but also speech challenges. She was doing her best, but for some, that was not good enough.

According to these Bible verses, what does Jesus say about our singing to Him?

Read Psalm 96:1. Who is to sing to the Lord? _____

Read Psalm 96:2a. When are we to sing God’s praises? _____

Read Psalm 98:1b. Why do we sing to God? _____

Read Psalm 98:4. What attitude are we to have as we sing praises to God? _____

Carol did just what we all are told to do according to God’s Word. Through her singing, Carol joyfully shared her love for Jesus.

Reflect: Do you have a Carol in your congregation? Is this individual being encouraged to sing along, or are they, instead, hushed into silence so the beauty of the hymns is not “ruined” by their voices?

Perhaps Paula, Robert, Keith, and Carol remind you of someone you know. Their names have been changed for this study, but not in my heart. Each of them is a child of God. Each of them has been led by the Holy Spirit and by the encouragement of people who care for them to find their special talent (gift) from God. God is working in them and through them so they are able to use their talents to the fullest. So, do a little “mining” in your congregation and communities and find some “buried talents” that will bring God glory by their use. May the Holy Spirit work in all of us so that we each reflect the light of Christ into this dark and dying world.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have redeemed each one of us from the disability of sin. We are made righteous through faith in You as our Lord and Savior. You graciously give every person talents to use to glorify You and to serve You and others. Open our eyes to the talents You’ve given to the individuals around us who have special learning and physical needs. Help us to cherish and love them as You do. Help us to encourage and nurture the talents of people with special needs so they may have the joy we have that comes from telling others and showing others Your saving love. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Sing: “Take My Life and Let It Be,” (LSB 783, TLH 400, LW 404)

Mining Hidden Talents
Written by Helen Mayer, Cutler, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Mining Hidden Talents

Leader's Guide

Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study for participants, Bibles, and hymnals]

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10).

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You have wonderfully created each one of us. You have given every person gifts and talents to be used to serve You and to serve one another. As we study Your Word today, open our eyes to those individuals around us who have special physical and learning needs. Help us to see these individuals as You do, with love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Those of you who are familiar with the mining industry know that mining is hard work. It takes lots of time, patience, care, and persistence to mine the treasured gems in God's creation. This is also true when mining hidden talents in those people around you who are also God's creation. When we mine hidden talents in people, we don't use drills, pick-axes, or dynamite as coal or gem miners do. Instead, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we use loving patience. As does everyone who God has created, individuals with special learning and physical needs also have unique gifts which God has given them. To mine their talents may take a little more patience and perseverance, but as you will see from the people we are about to meet, the effort will yield treasured blessings. Let's meet some very special people and take a look at how they are using to God's glory the talents He has given them that have been "mined" from within them.

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Read Philippians 4:4–9 and list some of the qualities that Paul mentions, which Paula mirrored in her life. Paula was gentle, kind, prayerful, and content. She joyfully praised God. She showed God’s peace to others.

How did Paula use her talents for her Savior? Paula prayed for others. She also tried to help others peacefully resolve their conflicts with one another.

Reflect: Is there a “Paula” in your congregation who is unable to get out and who can use her hidden talent to pray for others?

Robert

Robert, too, was a “special” child of God who lived in a group home. He had spent most of his life in the care of others because when he was born “different” his parents were told it would be best for him to be “put away” for he would never be able to live an independent life. However, someone forgot to tell that to Robert. Robert was a happy, talkative, caring individual. Even though he faced physical and mental challenges, Robert was a natural greeter. With the help of his caregivers, each Sunday Robert was at the doors of the church before anyone else. He had a big smile and shared it with everyone who came through the doors. He would approach each worshipper with the greeting, “Hi, my name is Robert—what is yours? Did you come to worship my Jesus?” To some, Robert was different—not at all the person you would expect to greet worshippers. But to Jesus, Robert was a wonderful missionary. He gave glory to his Savior as he welcomed people to church without hesitating to share with them his love for his Lord Jesus.

Read Romans 15:7. How are we to welcome others? We are to welcome others with joy and love as Christ welcomes us.

Our Lord Jesus is the expert miner of hidden talents. Name some of the individuals others did not consider worthy whom Jesus called to faith and whose talents He utilized. Jesus called to faith Matthew, Zacchaeus and other tax collectors, the Samaritan woman at the well, Nicodemus, the thief on the cross, little children, and common fishermen like Peter and John.

Jesus has rescued us all from the most unworthy position possible. His death and resurrection delivers us all from the disability of sin, from eternal death, and from the devil’s heinous plans. But even though in the eyes of Jesus, we are loved and cherished, we often see those with differences and with mental and physical challenges as less than we are. What is it that can make us blind to the talents of those with special needs? Things that can make us blind to the talents and worthiness of anyone, as well as those with special needs include fear, misunderstanding, not knowing how to communicate, and sinful ignorance of the worth of others.

For what can you ask God in prayer to help you better see the worth and talents of others? Provide some time for participants to respond to this question. It is not necessary that they share their responses with the group.

Reflect: Are there members of your congregation, who like Robert, are full of the love of Jesus, but do not fit the picture or mold we have to be greeters or to serve in other meaningful ways? Maybe it is time to “mine” their talents for Jesus’ work.

Keith

Keith struggled in all his classes. Reading and any subject that required reading were sometimes more than he could bear. He wanted so much to fit in and be part of the class. During class discussions, Keith sat quietly. His special needs made him feel like an outsider

looking in. His classmates and teacher tried to help him. His teacher spent one-on-one time each day with Keith as the rest of the class did their assigned work. It took a little “mining”, but she discovered that Keith loved art and was very good at it. Keith’s teacher then began to give him special assignments where he could use his artistic talents. Keith beamed when he could turn in an assignment at the same time as his classmates. He soon became the program designer for special school activities. When we would have art as a class, Keith became the “teacher”—helping others with his talent, patiently showing them time and time again how to draw or create wonderful artwork.

Read Ephesians 4:2. According to this verse, how are we to accept others? God wants us to accept others with humility, gentleness, patience, and love that bears their burdens.

How did Keith’s teacher use the wisdom from Ephesians 4:2 to mine his artistic talent? Keith’s teacher spent personal time with him to get to know him and to uncover his talent in art. She was loving and patient with him as she gently “mined” his talent. She had empathy toward his feelings of being an outsider and came up with a plan so that Keith and his talents could shine in front of his classmates.

How might you use this wisdom as you encourage all people, including those with special needs, to uncover and share the talents with which God has blessed them? Encourage participants to share their responses.

Reflect: Just as God gave Keith the gift of art to share, He gives everyone a special talent. Do you have a Keith in your congregation who loves to express himself through art? Have you taken advantage of such talent from individuals who are not the typical “artists”? Is it time to do some “mining” to discover the hidden talents which lay beneath the surface just waiting for a chance to be shared?

Carol

Almost every Sunday morning, Carol sat in church a few pews behind me. As a young child, I could not figure out why she would always have a hymnal in her hand and would always sing with us, yet her words never matched ours. She never seemed to be singing the same thing we were. I even heard some adults in church try to tell her not to sing, but Carol loved Jesus and loved singing. Carol was a “special” child of God who not only had learning challenges, but also speech challenges. She was doing her best, but for some, that was not good enough.

According to these Bible verses, what does Jesus say about our singing to Him?

Read Psalm 96:1. Who is to sing to the Lord? All the earth, meaning all people, are to sing to the Lord.

Read Psalm 96:2a. When are we to sing God’s praises? We are to sing to the Lord every day.

Read Psalm 98:1b. Why do we sing to God? We are to sing to the Lord to praise Him for all the marvelous things He has done and continues to do for us.

Read Psalm 98:4. What attitude are we to have as we sing praises to God? We are to sing to the Lord with joy.

Carol did just what we all are told to do according to God’s Word. Through her singing, Carol joyfully shared her love for Jesus.

Reflect: Do you have a Carol in your congregation? Is this individual being encouraged to sing along, or are they instead, hushed into silence so the beauty of the hymns is not “ruined” by their voices?

Perhaps Paula, Robert, Keith, and Carol remind you of someone you know. Their names have been changed for this study, but not in my heart. Each of them is a child of God. Each of them has been led by the Holy Spirit and by the encouragement of people who care for them to find their special talent (gift) from God. God is working in them and through them so they are able to use their talents the fullest. So, do a little “mining” in your congregation and communities and find some “buried talents” that will bring God glory by their use. May the Holy Spirit work in all of us so that we each reflect the light of Christ into this dark and dying world.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have redeemed each one of us from the disability of sin. We are made righteous through faith in You as our Lord and Savior. You graciously give every person talents to use to glorify You and to serve You and others. Open our eyes to the talents You’ve given to the individuals around us who have special learning and physical needs. Help us to cherish and love them as You do. Help us to encourage and nurture the talents of people with special needs so they may have the joy we have that comes from telling others and showing others Your saving love. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Sing: “Take My Life and Let It Be,” (LSB 783, TLH 400, LW 404)

Mining Hidden Talents
Leader’s Guide
Written by Helen Mayer, Cutler, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



What An Opportunity! Devotion

Serve the LORD with gladness! (Psalm 100:2a)

Have you had a unique opportunity in your life? Perhaps you have been blessed to attend college, to advance in your job, to travel to a special part of the world on a mission trip, or to use your skills and passion to help people in your community. Opportunity is defined as “a favorable juncture of circumstances,” “an occasion or situation which makes it possible to do something, or the possibility of doing something” (*Cambridge English Dictionary* and *Miriam-Webster.com Dictionary* 2018).

Whatever opportunities you have enjoyed, today there is an opportunity for each of us. That opportunity or “possibility of doing something” is Lent! Lent is an opportunity. Lent is a favorable juncture of time where we are given the gift of 40 days to prepare for Easter. This opportunity begins on Ash Wednesday. For 40 weekdays, we pause, remember, and contemplate what God has done and continues to do for us. So, what might be your “opportunity” this Lenten season?

Lent may mean attending Lenten services where we focus on repentance. When we fully repent, God graciously forgives our sins and releases us from the guilt and sorrow our sins cause us. Knowing God forgives our sins for Jesus’ sake, we are filled with joy and thanksgiving that leads us to abundant praise and worship for our great God.

Lent may also mean giving up something. Fasting is one such way to do this. In Matthew 6:16–18, Jesus talks about the proper way to fast. For some, giving up a type of food or other item for the Lenten season is a daily and constant reminder for them of Jesus’ total sacrifice for us when He gave up His life on the cross to rescue us from sin and eternal death.

But instead of giving up something for Lent, this season can also be an opportunity for each of us to also consider what we can **add** to our lives that is good. A good addition might be to write notes (40 of them for each day in the Lenten season) to thank people in your life or tell them you are thinking of them and praying for them that day. Another good addition might mean reading a different psalm each day of Lent as your daily prayer. The Lenten season can be an opportunity to rise and shine 15 minutes early and spend the time in God’s presence or even give up a 30-minute television show to add more time in His Word. Or motivated by Christ’s own acts of kindness and love, you might wish to do an act of kindness for others.

Another something we can add during Lent might be to find items in your home, maybe even 40 of them, to give to a service organization in your community that can give them to help those in need. Or perhaps you could encourage members of your family to share some “out of the normal” nice things with one another. For example, instead of just saying “Thank you” or “Good job,” take the opportunity to tell your spouse, “I love how you help with the kids.” Or tell your kids, “I love how you work hard on your homework,” or “I love how you make others feel they are special.”

The Lenten season can be a new opportunity for you, “an occasion to do something” memorable and meaningful. Whether you choose to give up something or choose to add something good, spend time in prayer and thanksgiving as the joyous celebration of Jesus’

resurrection approaches. Ask the Holy Spirit to use your Lenten “opportunity” to prepare your heart for Easter in a way that is meaningful and that deepens your relationship with God. Enjoy your opportunity this Lenten season!

Prayer: Dear God, may we always, and in every opportunity, be Your willing servants. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

What An Opportunity!

Written by Past LWML President Linda Reiser, Grand Island, Nebraska

Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Making Lent an Opportunity!

Bible Study

Serve the LORD with gladness! (Psalm 100:2a)

[Please provide: hymnals, Bibles, and copies of this study for attendees.]

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me (Psalm 63:3–8).

In The Presence Of God

Sleepless nights can create a whole gamut of feelings and emotions. They may be the result of cares and concerns of the day, multiple aches and pains in the body hindering a comfortable resting position, or struggling with the circumstances we have yet to face. It is seldom because we are overwhelmed with the realization that, no matter the causes, we remain in the presence of God. Wrapping a blanket around our heads in frustration is so much easier than wrapping our hearts and souls around with the promises of God through His Word.

During the passionate season of Lent there is a way to change all that. Rather than giving up something for Lent, we can strive to take our eyes off ourselves and redirect the eyes of our hearts on the service we can do for Christ. Rather than “giving up” something for Lent, perhaps “giving to” others for Him is the answer. It may not change our sleepless nights, but it will prepare our minds to praise Him as long as we live, to be satisfied with the rich Spiritual food He has to offer, and to sing for joy under the cover of His wings. In these moments, we are in the presence of God.

Preparing Our Hearts For Service

Opening Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, as we focus on You and Your calling for us in our lives of service, help us to think first about the tremendous sacrifice Your dear Son paid for us. Observing His love, may we turn our thoughts from self to You and Your kingdom's work. May we rest in the knowledge that Your love covers all our mistakes because of Jesus' sacrifice. Prepare our hearts and our spirits through Your Word, and may it move us to action for You. In Jesus' name, and for His sake, we ask this. Amen.

As we open our thoughts toward God and His Lenten direction for our lives, let us examine some steps that by the power of the Holy Spirit can guide us toward Him. As we do so, may God lead us so we can better serve Him with gladness, not only during Lent but also throughout the weeks and months to come.

We often labor intently and even intensely for physical and mental things. The pursuit of spiritual things, however, is often set aside or strived for only if time allows. Yet one of the true beauties of a godly life is spending time with the Source of all true spiritual things. Let us discover the benefits of searching the Scriptures for the love God desires to reveal and supply to us.

First – Spiritual Steps

What do these verses have to say about where our focus should be and the blessings God provides?

- 2 Corinthians 4:18: _____
- Ephesians 1:17–20: _____
- Colossians 3:1-3: _____
- Hebrews 12:2: _____

When Christ is our focus, we trust Him to provide wisdom for our decisions and direction in life. The Holy Spirit daily reminds us that our lives are hidden in Him. In other words, He IS our life! Through His Spirit, we have the eyes of our hearts (our spirits) enlightened, and we discover the abundant riches of His grace. The spiritual treasures we receive in and through Him become a priority as He enables us to fix our hearts and minds on Him, first and foremost.

Second – Relationship Steps

To what does God want us to devote ourselves?

- Colossians 4:2: _____
- Ephesians 6:16–17: _____
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17: _____
- Colossians 3:16: _____

It is in and through the study of God's Word that the Holy Spirit reveals His hidden secrets (1 Corinthians 2:9–12). Granting us more and more insight of who He is, a relationship is formed – one He has designed at our Baptism and one in which He forgives our sins and strengthens us through the Lord's Supper. And as we *continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving* (Colossians 4:2), His Spirit strengthens our relationship with Him and gives us a heart:

- to follow God's will passionately.
- to be open to opportunities to serve Him and others.
- to prayerfully develop and carry out ways to serve Him.

How have you seen evidence of this in your life? _____

Third – Steps Toward Service

For whom does God want you to live?

- Romans 12:3–8: _____
- 2 Corinthians 5:14–15: _____

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6–7). And because you have been buried with him in baptism, and raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God (Colossians 2:12), resolve within yourself that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17).

After All These Come Opportunities!

Opportunities cross our paths every day, whether we are residing in our homes alone, among the hustle and bustle of the work place, or in the community. The opportunities may be that of saying to a clerk, “Have a blessed day!” or “How can I pray for you today?” In a meeting with friends for lunch, we can be a good listener and an encourager. With pen in hand, we can write a note to someone who is lonely or encountering a stay in the hospital. The field of opportunities is wide open and in need of fulfilling.

Ideas To Consider

Take note of the where, when, and how.

- Where can I serve? What is available at home, at church, or in the community?
- When are the best times to serve? What works best for me and those whom I plan to serve?
- How can I serve better? What am I physically able to do without excuse?

(Remember, get rid of excuses – God is always ready to empower you. Consider Moses’ excuses and God’s responses as you read the following: Exodus 3:11–14, 4:1–17.)

Make lists to stretch your thoughts by writing a word or phrase that begins with the letters of the alphabet or choose 10 to 15 possibilities of service and list according to priority.

After all this is done, determine steps that lead to gratitude.

- Create a “Blessing Jar” throughout Lent. You may discover that you want the activity to continue after Lent.
- Keep a record book of descriptive words that highlight God’s grace and goodness. Think about what these words mean in your life and how it can change your thinking of who God is.
- Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. Look for God’s blessings, large and small. Use these ideas as a springboard for new opportunities, even if it’s as simple as writing a note of gratitude for the loving service of others.
- To grow in your attitude of gratitude, read Psalm 145. As you read through it, make a list of the words that express the extravagant love and generosity of God. Take time to offer prayers that reflect a thankful heart.
- Other verses to consider: Zephaniah 3:17; 2 Corinthians 9:10–12; James 1:5; 1 John 3:1.

The Three R’s

Let Lent be a time of reconciliation, renewal, and redirection. As you do, trust Christ to follow through with the plans He lays upon your heart.

Read Ephesians 3:16–19 to discover the incredible desires of Christ for us as we pursue the three R's.

Be Reconciled

What do these verses say about God's reconciliation?

- Romans 5:10–11: _____
- 1 John 4:9–10: _____

Be Renewed

What do these verses say about how God renews us to serve Him?

- Isaiah 40:30–31: _____
- Romans 12:2: _____
- 2 Corinthians 4:16: _____
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: _____
- Colossians 3:10: _____
- Titus 3:5–6: _____

Be Redirected

What do these verses say about how God redirects us to serve Him?

- 2 Corinthians 5:18–20a: _____
- Colossians 3:12–15: _____
- Hebrews 13:20–21: _____
- 1 Peter 2:9: _____

Just as God's love, grace, and mercy are granted in immeasurable abundance, we can pray that these treasures from Him can be easily shared and revealed through Him to others. When our eyes are opened to the needs of others, the focus on self finds a release. God may even lead us to discover that, despite our own personal struggles and our overly-satisfied contentment from personal accomplishments, His blessings of peace and joy abound when serving the needs of others.

Living In His Eternal Life Today

God provides opportunities to serve Him and others to grow our faith. God works through service opportunities to teach us more of Christ and His love.

- Philippians 3:7–9 – Consider everything as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ; gain and know Christ first – for He is eternal life.
- Philippians 3:12–14 – Press on toward the goal which is Christ who is eternal life, now and forever.
- John 17:3 – This is eternal life; that we may know Christ
- John 3:36 – Whoever believes in the Son **has** eternal life!

Knowing Jesus is the greatest gift we are given and often the most noticeable during Lent. We confess His tremendous sacrifice on the cross and the power of the resurrection granted to us through Him. Every day we can also acknowledge that we experience eternal life because we are in Him and He is in us. Swallowed in His grace and covered and quieted with His love, Jesus promises to be with us, to guide us, and to lead us into service for Him. Jesus has reconciled us to God. Our greatest gift in return is to give to others for Him. Embrace this Lenten season with joy and offer Him a thankful heart for living His life for us and for forever granting us eternal life. That's the best Lenten offering we can present to Him!

Closing Prayer: Dear Jesus, we adore You and praise You for the incredible price you paid on the cross and for the eternal life we receive through Your resurrection from the dead. We pray that You would now give us an extra measure of Your Spirit during this season of Lent as You open our eyes to the abundant acts of love we can do for others each day. May our service be our gift to You as we honor You for who You are. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20–21).

Closing Hymn: (Select one of the following) “Christ, the Life of All Living” LSB 420, TLH 151, LW 94; “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” LSB 426, TLH 175, LW 115; “In the Cross of Christ I Glory” LSB 427, TLH 354, LW 101.

Making Lent an Opportunity!
Written by Jan Brunette, Fate, Texas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Making Lent an Opportunity!

Leader's Guide

Bible Study

Serve the LORD with gladness! (Psalm 100:2a)

(Please provide: hymnals, Bibles, and copies of this study for attendees.)

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me (Psalm 63:3–8).

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Sleepless nights can create a whole gamut of feelings and emotions. They may be the result of cares and concerns of the day, multiple aches and pains in the body hindering a comfortable resting position, or struggling with the circumstances we have yet to face. It is seldom because we are overwhelmed with the realization that, no matter the causes, we remain in the presence of God. Wrapping a blanket around our heads in frustration is so much easier than wrapping our hearts and souls around with the promises of God through His Word.

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We often labor intently and even intensely for physical and mental things. The pursuit of spiritual things, however, is often set aside or strived for only if time allows. Yet one of the true beauties of a godly life is spending time with the Source of all true spiritual things. Let us discover the benefits of searching the Scriptures for the love God desires to reveal and supply to us.

First – Spiritual Steps

What do these verses have to say about where our focus should be and the blessings God provides?

- 2 Corinthians 4:18 Look not to worldly things for answers, but to those that are eternal.
- Ephesians 1:17–20 God gives us wisdom and knowledge of Him and richly blesses all believers with the certain hope of eternal life.
- Colossians 3:1–3 Seek the things that are from above.
- Hebrews 12:2 Look to Jesus, our Savior and King.

When Christ is our focus, we trust Him to provide wisdom for our decisions and direction in life. The Holy Spirit daily reminds us that our lives are hidden in Him. In other words, He IS our life! Through His Spirit, we have the eyes of our hearts (our spirits) enlightened, and we discover the abundant riches of His grace. The spiritual treasures we receive in and through Him become a priority as He enables us to fix our hearts and minds on Him, first and foremost.

Second – Relationship Steps

To what does God want us to devote ourselves?

- Colossians 4:2 God wants us to devote ourselves to prayer with thankful hearts.
- Ephesians 6:16–17 Take up faith and God’s Word to fight Satan.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Keep on praying.
- Colossians 3:16 Be in God’s Word and share it.

It is in and through the study of God’s Word that the Holy Spirit reveals His hidden secrets (1 Corinthians 2:9–12). Granting us more and more insight of who He is, a relationship is formed – one He has designed since our Baptism and one in which He forgives our sins and strengthens us through the Lord’s Supper. And as we *continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving* (Colossians 4:2), His Spirit strengthens our relationship with Him and gives us a heart:

- to follow God’s will passionately.
- to be open to opportunities to serve Him and others.
- to prayerfully develop and carry out ways to serve Him.

How have you seen evidence of this in your life? _____

Third – Steps Toward Service

For whom does God want you to live?

- Romans 12:3–8: God wants us to work together with others, using the gifts He has given us.
- 2 Corinthians 5:14–15: We live for Christ.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6–7). And because you have been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God (Colossians 2:12), resolve within yourself that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17).

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Ideas To Consider

Take note of the where, when, and how.

- Where can I serve? What is available at home, at church, or in the community? Answers will be unique for each individual.
- When are the best times to serve? What works best for me and those whom I plan to serve? Answers will be unique for each individual.
- How can I serve better? What am I physically able to do without excuse? Answers will be unique for each individual.

(Remember, get rid of excuses – God is always ready to empower you. Consider Moses’ excuses and God’s responses as you read the following: Exodus 3:11–14, 4:1–17.)

Moses gave five different excuses why he couldn’t do the work God had called and prepared for him to do. For every excuse, God responded with a reason He could.

<u>Moses</u>	<u>God</u>
(3:11–12) Who am I that I should go?	I will be with you.
(3:13–14) What if I go and they ask Your name?	I AM WHO I AM...I AM sent you.
(4:1–9) What if they don’t believe me?	I will give you three signs.
(4:10–12) I am slow of speech and tongue.	I will help you speak.
(4:13–17) Please send someone else.	Aaron and I will help you.

Excuses are easy to come by. Pray that when opportunities come, we may be less like Moses and more like Christ in His willingness to do the Father’s will.

Make lists to stretch your thoughts by writing a word or phrase that begins with the letters of the alphabet or choose 10 to 15 possibilities of service and list according to priority.

After all this is done, determine steps that lead to gratitude.

- Create a “Blessing Jar” throughout Lent. You may discover that you want the activity to continue after Lent.

- Keep a record book of descriptive words that highlight God's grace and goodness. Think about what these words mean in your life and how it can change your thinking of who God is.
- Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. Look for God's blessings, large and small. Use these ideas as a springboard for new opportunities, even if it's as simple as writing a note of gratitude for the loving service of others.
- To grow in your attitude of gratitude, read Psalm 145. As you read through it, make a list of the words that express the extravagant love and generosity of God. Take time to offer prayers that reflect a thankful heart.
Examples are great, unsearchable, mighty acts, glorious splendor, wondrous works, awesome deeds, greatness, abundant goodness, gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, good to all, merciful, faithful, kind, near to all, hears our cries, saves and preserves.
- Other verses to consider:
Zephaniah 3:17; 2 Corinthians 9:10–12; James 1:5; 1 John 3:1.

The Three R's

Let Lent be a time of reconciliation, renewal, and redirection. As you do, trust Christ to follow through with the plans He lays upon your heart.

Read Ephesians 3:16–19 to discover the incredible desires of Christ for us as we pursue the three R's.

In all your studies and growth, may your greatest desire be to know of Christ's love more and more. Don't seek solutions or answers; seek Christ. He will provide the answers in His way and time.

Be Reconciled

What do these verses say about God's reconciliation?

- Romans 5:10–11: Jesus' death for our sins brought us back to God.
- 1 John 4:9–10: Out of His great love for us sinners, God sent His Son Jesus to pay the price we owed for our sins. Jesus' actions on our behalf brought us back to God.

Be Renewed

What do these verses say about how God renews us to serve Him?

- Isaiah 40:30–31: God promises to renew our strength as we serve Him.
- Romans 12:2: The Holy Spirit works in us to turn our hearts and minds to God and grants us discernment to know God's will for us.
- 2 Corinthians 4:16: Every day God renews us to serve Him.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17: Jesus gives us a new, eternal life.
- Colossians 3:10: In Baptism, we put on Christ.

- Titus 3:5–6: Daily, the Holy Spirit renews us by grace as we live in the current and on-going power of our Baptism.

Be Redirected

What do these verses say about how God redirects us to serve Him?

- 2 Corinthians 5:18–20a: God gives us the ministry of reconciliation so that we, as ambassadors for Christ, tell others that salvation is found in Christ alone.
- Colossians 3:12–15: By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are given compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, and loving hearts.
- Hebrews 13:20–21: God equips us and works in us to do His will.
- 1 Peter 2:9: God has chosen us to tell others of His saving love in Christ Jesus.

Just as God's love, grace, and mercy are granted in immeasurable abundance, we can pray that these treasures from Him can be easily shared and revealed through Him to others. When our eyes are opened to the needs of others, the focus on self finds a release. God may even lead us to discover that, despite our own personal struggles and our overly-satisfied contentment from personal accomplishments, His blessings of peace and joy abound when serving the needs of others.

Living In His Eternal Life Today

God provides opportunities to serve Him and others to grow our faith. God works through service opportunities to teach us more of Christ and His love.

- Philippians 3:7–9 – Consider everything as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ; gain and know Christ first – for He is eternal life.
- Philippians 3:12–14 – Press on toward the goal which is Christ who is eternal life, now and forever.
- John 17:3 – This is eternal life; that we may know Christ.
- John 3:36 – Whoever believes in the Son **has** eternal life!

John 17:3 and 3:36 both clarify that we already possess the blessings of eternal life today. While its final fulfillment will not occur until we die and are raised to life in heaven with Christ, we still share in all the treasures of that life because we, as baptized children, are in Him and He in us. His eternal, spiritual blessings are beyond comprehension and are part of our inheritance. (That knowledge takes us back to the steps that guide us toward Him on page 1 of this study. Cherish it! Embrace it!)

Knowing Jesus is the greatest gift we are given and often the most noticeable during Lent. We confess His tremendous sacrifice on the cross and the power of the resurrection granted to us through Him. Every day we can also acknowledge that we experience eternal life because we are in Him and He is in us. Swallowed in His grace and covered and quieted with His love, Jesus promises to be with us, to guide us, and to lead us into service for Him. Jesus has reconciled us to God. Our greatest gift in return is to share it with others. Embrace this Lenten

season with joy and offer Him a thankful heart for living His life for us and for forever granting us true eternal life. That's the best Lenten offering we can present to Him!

Closing Prayer: Dear Jesus, we adore You and praise You for the incredible price you paid on the cross and for the eternal life we receive through Your resurrection from the dead. We pray that You would now give us an extra measure of Your Spirit during this season of Lent as you open our eyes to the abundant acts of love we can do for others each day. May our service be our gift to You as we honor You for who You are. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20–21).

Closing Hymn: (Select one of the following) “Christ, the Life of All Living” LSB 420, TLH 151, LW 94; “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” LSB 426, TLH 175, LW 115; “In the Cross of Christ I Glory” LSB 427, TLH 354, LW 101.

Making Lent an Opportunity!
Leader's Guide
Written by Jan Brunette, Fate, Texas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



We Are Full!

Devotion

[Please provide: whiteboard and markers or poster board and markers, hymnals]

“ ... Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3b)

Imagine that there is a glass of water on a table in front of you. It is an eight-ounce glass which contains four ounces of water. Now, here's a question for you: is the glass half-full or half-empty?

Our broken, earthly world reminds us that the top of the glass is EMPTY. “Hurry,” the evil one whispers in our ears, “and fill up your glass.” When we feel the emptiness of this troubled world, we try almost anything and everything to fill it. We shop. We chase that perfect house, outfit, or car. We strive for the top position at work and in our career, no matter the costs. We work to get our children into the best school. We try to fill the emptiness with drugs or alcohol. Idols creep into our lives like social media or sports or gym time beyond healthy goals. Loneliness also empties us. The widow feels alone as the other side of her bed is empty. The grumpy old man sits at an empty table every day. We pack our schedules, but the calendar's events leave us drained instead of refreshed. This world offers empty gas tanks, pantries, bank accounts, lungs when we want to run, wombs. Oh yes, we know all about being empty. All of us.

Now look closer at your own reflection in that glass of water. Sometimes, we are not just empty, but we also empty others. We speak harsh words or think unkind thoughts. How many times have we already broken the Ten Commandments today? Empty. During Lent we reflect on our own sins which took Jesus to the cross. These sins might include poor stewardship of time or money, not trusting God to provide for our needs, broken promises, even broken vows, not guarding our hearts from that obscene movie, saying that bad word that just slipped so easily, wanting something our neighbor has. The list of sins that empties us and others goes on, and you know your own heart.

Yes, this world offers troubles and so much “empty.” So how are we to be filled? We cannot do it ourselves.

Thanks be to God, Jesus knows our hearts. But, He does not leave us broken and empty. Instead, He saves us.

In God's unique plan, He has a special perspective on the half-full, half-empty glass of water. He reminds us that “empty” is not always a bad thing: as He shows us the empty tomb! Out of His immense love for us, God sent His Son and let Him die so that you and I may have life. Though we are empty, broken, and even dead in our sins; Jesus has fulfilled the Law for us. He took our place on the cross that we deserved because of our sins. Then, on that glorious Easter morning, the greatest miracle ever occurred: Jesus rose from the dead! Through Christ, we are given mercy, grace, and a new, eternal life (Psalm 23:6). We are forgiven and renewed. We go from empty and are made FULL by our loving and merciful God.

So just what is it to be **full**?

Print a large letter “F” on the whiteboard or poster board. Print the word “Forgiven” next to it with a different colored marker.

F: Forgiven. Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins. His resurrection that we celebrate on Easter (and really every Sunday of the year) proves that He is victorious over sin, death, and the devil. Remember that water in the glass? When we are baptized, simple water combined with the power of God’s Word washes the sin from our hearts. We are rescued from sin, death, and the devil. We are given a new, eternal life. We now have hope, and a purpose. We are forgiven! We are adopted as heirs into God’s family. Every day, even when we are empty, the Holy Spirit renews and refills us so we can love and serve our forgiving God.

Below the letter “F,” print a large letter “U” on the whiteboard or poster board. Print the word “United” next to it with a different colored marker.

U: United. Romans 6:3–4 reminds us, *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* Through His death and resurrection, we are united by faith with Jesus our Savior. Whenever we are empty, Jesus invites us to come to His table to eat and drink the bread and wine, His body and blood, given for you for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26–28). Through the Lord’s Supper, Jesus strengthens our faith and draws us closer to Him. We are also united by our common faith to the other individuals who partake of Holy Communion. United with Christ and with one another, our risen Lord leads us to love and serve Him and other people.

Below the letter “U,” print a large letter “L” on the whiteboard or poster board. Print the word “Life” next to it with a different colored marker.

L: Life. Jesus Himself tells us, *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10b). Other Bible translations use the words “to the full” in place of “abundantly”. Our Triune God is all about life. God gives us physical life. Through His Word and the water of Holy Baptism, God graciously gives us eternal life. Jesus reassures us, *“... I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die”* (John 11:25–26).

Below the letter “L,” print another large letter “L” on the whiteboard or poster board. Print the word “Love” next to it with a different colored marker.

L: Love! Jesus says, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). You are so dearly loved that God sent His one and only Son to suffer and die so that you might live! And what should our response be to God making us truly full? He commands us to *“... love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another”* (John 13:34). We once were broken glasses, or cracked pots (Jeremiah 18:1-6), that have been reassembled by God Himself. He has reassembled us so well that now we are good for carrying His love to others. Yes, we were empty, but have been made saints through Christ; holy in the sight of the only Holy One. His love overflows through our now ‘full’-filled lives.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, may our whole lives reflect that because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are FULL instead of empty.

Sing: “Holy, Holy, Holy,” verse 1. LSB 507, TLH 246. LW 168

Prayer: Lord God, our holy, almighty, loving Father. We know that, on our own, we are unholy. We are empty. We hurt others. We are sorry, Lord. Thank You for not leaving us empty. Thank You for sending Jesus as the fulfillment in our place. Thank You for forgiveness; for Your means of grace through which You give us forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Thank You for loving us beyond our emptiness. Thank You for filling our lives with Your love, hope, joy, and peace. Please be with all those who are still empty. Help us to show them Your love. Help us, now made holy in Your sight through the death and resurrection of Your holy, most precious Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, to continue to serve You with gladness. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

From Empty to Full
Written by Hannah Jackson, St. Louis, MO
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



From Empty to Full Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Theme Verse: "... *Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*"
(Isaiah 6:3b)

During this Bible study, we will look at the women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning. In their grief, they intended to care for the physical body of Jesus. In their sorrow they came to His tomb as empty vessels. But soon, Jesus would fill them with overflowing joy.

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are indeed a most loving and caring God. You daily watch over and take care of us. We are sorry for the times we focus only on the emptiness created by our sinfulness. Allow the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see the wonderful fullness You offer to us through our repentance and Your forgiveness. Help us to see and better appreciate the great gift You gave to the women at the tomb, allowing them to be the first to receive and share the glorious news of Jesus' resurrection. In the name of Jesus, our risen Savior and Lord. Amen.

Focusing On Our Theme Verse

Read out loud with the rest of your group Isaiah 6:3b from the top of this page.

Holy, Holy, Holy

The repetition of *Holy, holy, holy* emphasizes that we worship the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, study note for v. 3, page 1098.) "The term *hosts* refers to military service, the ranks and divisions of troops. Though the hosts of the Lord are often angels, they include His people Israel, the Levites, the 'ministering women' (Exodus 38:8), and all of creation, which God set in order and continues to rule" (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, "The LORD of Hosts," page 1291).

What makes Isaiah 6:3b an appropriate verse for Easter? _____

Empty

What details do you learn from the following verses concerning the women who followed Jesus and who were at His tomb on the first Easter morning?

Matthew 27:55–56: _____

Mark 15:40–41: _____

These women traveled with Jesus and His disciples and ministered to them.

Read Luke 8:1–3. As they traveled with Jesus and His disciples, how did these women work for the Lord? _____

What did these women see, hear, and come to believe as they traveled with Jesus? _____

Traveling with Jesus was not an easy task. It was rough living most of the time with few luxuries (of their day) to depend upon. But these women willingly chose to follow the one called the Messiah (Christ), the Anointed One. They were blessed to see His coming in their lifetime and to witness His servant leadership.

As the events of Good Friday unfolded, the hearts of these women were broken as they watched from a distance as Jesus was crucified on the cross. They experienced complete emptiness. The One who was to save them and all people was dead. All their hope was gone with Him.

Share a time when you felt this type of emptiness. _____

But God did not leave the women in their empty state. He had a plan for them just as he has a plan for you and me when we feel lost, alone, and empty.

Full

Read Mark 16:1–8.

Put yourself in Mary Magdalene's sandals. She had walked with Jesus since He cast the demons from her. She had heard firsthand much of His teaching. She believed He was the promised Savior. Then she watched Him suffer in anguish and die. Mary walked to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning with an empty, aching heart. How did the hearts of Mary Magdalene and the other women at the tomb change upon hearing the angel's words?

Read John 20:11–16.

The instant Mary Magdalene recognized Jesus, her Teacher and Master, her heart, her soul, and her faith were filled to overflowing.

Share an instantaneous moment that you have experienced when joy filled your heart as it did Mary's. _____

Earlier that morning, even in their grief, the women continued to do what was needed. Just as they had cared for Jesus during His time of earthly ministry, on that first Easter day they had planned to continue to care for Jesus at the tomb to complete the preparations for the burial of His body. But Jesus had a larger task for these women – Mary Magdalene in particular.

Read John 20:17–18.

After she recognizes Him, what special job does Jesus give Mary Magdalene? _____

Reread John 20:18. Mary proclaims to Jesus' disciples, "I have seen the Lord." How do we "see" the Lord today? _____

As believers in Jesus, He gives us the same job He gave Mary Magdalene on that first Easter morning. In this Easter season, to whom might you joyfully announce the truth of Jesus, our risen Savior?

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us this time in Your Word and for blessing our study of these women on the first Easter morning. We ask as You did for Mary, to embolden us to tell the Good News of salvation daily to this hurting world in which we live. We ask for opportunities to declare, "I have seen and know the Lord." Strengthen us to proclaim the truth of Christ to those emptied by sin and hurt, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, they may be filled with the joy of believing that You have died and risen to give forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who trust in You. We pray this in the name of our Lord, Teacher, and risen Savior, Jesus. Amen.

From Empty to Full
Written by Karen Morrison, Wichita, Kansas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



From Empty to Full

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Theme Verse: "... *Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*"
(Isaiah 6:3b)

During this Bible study, we will look at the women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning. In their grief, they intended to care for the physical body of Jesus. In their sorrow they came to His tomb as empty vessels. But soon, Jesus would fill them with overflowing joy.

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are indeed a most loving and caring God. You daily watch over and take care of us. We are sorry for the times we focus only on the emptiness created by our sinfulness. Allow the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see the wonderful fullness You offer to us through our repentance and Your forgiveness. Help us to see and better appreciate the great gift You gave to the women at the tomb, allowing them to be the first to receive and share the glorious news of Jesus' resurrection. In the name of Jesus, our risen Savior and Lord. Amen.

Focusing On Our Theme Verse

Read out loud with the rest of your group Isaiah 6:3b from the top of this page.

Holy, Holy, Holy

The repetition of *Holy, holy, holy* emphasizes that we worship the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, study note for v. 3, page 1098). "The term *hosts* refers to military service, the ranks and divisions of troops. Though the hosts of the Lord are often angels, they include His people Israel, the Levites, the 'ministering women' (Exodus 38:8), and all of creation, which God set in order and continues to rule" (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, "The LORD of Hosts," page 1291).

What makes Isaiah 6:3b an appropriate verse for Easter? Isaiah 6:3b praises the Triune God. On Easter, all believers rejoice that Jesus died and rose to save us from sin, death, and the devil.

Empty

What details do you learn from the following verses concerning the women who followed Jesus and who were at His tomb on the first Easter morning?

Matthew 27:55–56: Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee watched from a distance as He was crucified. These women included Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Peter and John (the sons of Zebedee). These women had ministered to Jesus as He traveled.

Mark 15:40–41: The Gospel of Mark tells us that Salome was also there at Jesus' crucifixion.

These women traveled with Jesus and His disciples and ministered to them.

Read Luke 8:1–3. As they traveled with Jesus and His disciples, how did these women work for the Lord? As the women accompanied Jesus and His disciples, they would have heard some of Jesus' preaching and teaching. They also would likely have cooked meals for Jesus and His disciples and would have done other necessary chores for them so that they could preach and teach. Mary Magdalene witnessed Jesus' miraculous healing firsthand when He called seven demons out of her . Luke also names Joanna and Susanna as other women who followed Jesus. These women and others provided Jesus and His disciples financial support (v. 3).

What did these women see, hear, and come to believe as they traveled with Jesus? They would have heard about Jesus' miracles and, like Mary Magdalene, would have witnessed some of them. They would have heard Jesus proclaim that He is the Son of God, sent to save all people from sin. They would have come to believe that Jesus was indeed the promised Savior.

Traveling with Jesus was not an easy task. It was rough living most of the time with few luxuries (of their day) to depend upon. But these women willingly chose to follow the one called the Messiah (Christ), the Anointed One. They were blessed to see His coming in their lifetime and to witness His servant leadership.

As the events of Good Friday unfolded, the hearts of these women were broken as they watched from a distance as Jesus was crucified on the cross. They experienced complete emptiness. The One who was to save them and all people was dead. All their hope was gone with Him.

Share a time when you felt this type of emptiness. Answers will likely include the death of a loved one, cataclysmic life events like fire, flood, tornado, and other natural disasters, and diagnosis of illness/disease in a family member or themselves.

But God did not leave the women in their empty state. He had a plan for them just as he has a plan for you and me when we feel lost, alone, and empty.

Full

Read Mark 16:1–8.

Put yourself in Mary Magdalene's sandals. She had walked with Jesus since He cast the demons from her. She had heard firsthand much of His teaching. She believed He was the promised Savior. Then she watched Him suffer in anguish and die. Mary walked to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning with an empty, aching heart. How did the hearts of Mary Magdalene and the other women at the tomb change upon hearing the angel's words? Instead of sorrow, their hearts were filled with *trembling and astonishment ... for they were afraid* (v.8).

Read John 20:11–16.

The instant Mary Magdalene recognized Jesus, her Teacher and Master, her heart, her soul, and her faith were filled to overflowing.

Share an instantaneous moment that you have experienced when joy filled your heart as it did Mary's. While these do not compare with meeting Jesus face-to-face, some joyous moments in this life might include being present at the birth of a baby, watching a child/grandchild get married, or receiving a clean bill of health after a long-suffering illness/disease.

Earlier that morning, even in their grief, the women continued to do what was needed. Just as they had cared for Jesus during His time of earthly ministry, on that first Easter day they had planned to continue to care for Jesus at the tomb to complete the preparations for the burial of His body. But Jesus had a larger task for these women – Mary Magdalene in particular.

Read John 20:17–18.

After she recognizes Him, what special job does Jesus give Mary Magdalene? Jesus said to Mary, “Go to my brothers (His disciples) and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (v. 17) Mary was to tell the disciples that Jesus is alive.

Reread John 20:18. Mary proclaims to Jesus’ disciples, “I have seen the Lord.” How do we “see” the Lord today? While we do not physically see Jesus as Mary Magdalene did, Jesus reveals Himself to us today through His Word and Sacraments.

As believers in Jesus, He gives us the same job He gave Mary Magdalene on that first Easter morning. In this Easter season, to whom might you joyfully announce the truth of Jesus, our risen Savior? Encourage participants to think of a specific individual with whom they can share the Good News that Jesus died, rose, and lives forever for them. Then encourage them to actually share this truth with this person.

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us this time in Your Word and for blessing our study of these women on that first Easter morning. We ask as You did for Mary, to embolden us to tell the Good News daily of salvation to this hurting world in which we live. We ask for opportunities to declare, “I have seen and know the Lord.” Strengthen us to proclaim the truth of Christ to those emptied by sin and hurt, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, they may be filled with the joy of believing that You have died and risen to give forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who trust in You. We pray this in the name of our Lord, Teacher, Master, and risen Savior, Jesus. Amen.

From Empty to Full
Leader’s Guide
Written by Karen Morrison, Wichita, Kansas
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



A Resurrection Parade

Sketch/Short Program

[Please provide: two narrators, five women to model hats, five Easter bonnets/straw hats, copies of the bonnet item patterns found at the end of the sketch, yellow and orange cardstock paper, gray cardstock paper, dark brown cardstock paper, a small lightweight rock or picture of a rock, a small butterfly clip (either store-bought or made out of yellow cardstock paper), small metal clip, four small plastic Easter eggs, white cardstock paper, hot glue gun and glue sticks, pianist, music score for the song “Easter Parade” by Irving Berlin, copies of this program for each model and for the narrators, copy of the “Resurrection Parade” song for all present located at the end of this program]

To prepare: Make copies of the hat (bonnet) item patterns found at the end of the sketch. Use the patterns to make each of the hat items as described below. Attach the items to the hats, one item per hat.

Sunrise bonnet: a half sun with rays that looks like a sunrise made out of yellow and orange cardstock paper.

Empty tomb bonnet: an open tomb shape made out of gray cardstock paper. Hot glue a small lightweight rock or picture of a rock next to the opening of the tomb. Cut three small crosses from dark brown cardstock paper and hot glue them on the bonnet to the far left side of the empty tomb.

Butterfly bonnet: a store-bought or yellow cardstock paper butterfly glued to a metal clip. Clip the butterfly to the center of the bonnet.

Egg bonnet: four small plastic eggs attached to the hat with hot glue.

Faith bonnet: a dove shape cut from white cardstock paper to symbolize the Holy Spirit. Make sure that each of the hat items is large enough for the sketch audience to see.

Before the sketch begins: assemble the hat models (wearing their hats) out of sight until they are called forward by the narrator. As the audience arrives, hand out copies of the song, “Resurrection Parade” (found at the end of this sketch).

Narrator 1: Welcome, friends! Easter parades have their beginnings with the first Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Walks were held by early Christians to commemorate Jesus’ arrival into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and His walk to the cross on Good Friday. During the Dark Ages, early Christians held these solemn processions to demonstrate their unity in faith and to reach out to non-believers. Even back in these times, participants wore their finest clothes to show their respect to Jesus.

Narrator 2: Wearing new clothes for Easter began in Europe. In the early part of the 4th century, the Roman Emperor Constantine I ordered his subjects to wear their finest clothes in honor of Christ’s resurrection. From the 1880’s until the 1950’s, New York City’s Easter parade was a famous Easter celebration in the United States. Easter bonnets were worn by women as a festive part of the parade. Fancy hats also became a custom for women all over the U.S. to wear to church on Easter Sunday.

Narrator 1: In 1933, the American composer Irving Berlin wrote the song, “Easter Parade.” Originally a part of a Broadway revue called *As Thousands Cheer*, eventually the popular song became the basis for the film *Easter Parade*. You’ve likely heard its melody before.

Cue the pianist to play the melody of “Easter Parade.”

Narrator 2: Today, we have the privilege of hosting a resurrection parade. This parade, with the special Easter bonnets you are about to see, even has its own parade anthem, “Resurrection Parade.” Take out the lyrics sheets you were given as you arrived. Let’s practice this anthem together.

All sing: In your Easter bonnet with Easter joy upon it,
You’ll be a glowing witness of the Resurrection!
From L.A. to Dover, when people look you over,
They’ll know Jesus did something special for us.
On the avenues, streets, and roads, too,
Many will see God’s love for us found in Jesus who died and rose to save all.
So, proudly wear your bonnet, with Easter joy upon it
And share it with all people near and far ‘round the world.

As the song ends, cue the models to come out and stand before the audience as they wear their bonnets.

Narrator 1: Our first featured resurrection bonnet is the sunrise bonnet. (Cue the person wearing the bonnet with the rising sun to walk around the audience to model it.) A sunrise is an Easter symbol because as the sun, S-U-N, rose on that first Easter morning, the Son, S-O-N, rose from the dead, as we read in Mark 16, verses 1, 2, 5, and 6: *When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* Let’s give a round of applause to thank God for that first Easter morning. (Encourage the audience to applaud as the model returns back to stand before the audience.)

Narrator 2: Our next featured resurrection bonnet is the empty tomb bonnet. (Cue the person wearing the bonnet with empty tomb and stone to walk around the audience to model it.) The empty tomb is a proof of Christ’s resurrection. Luke 24:1–6a says: *But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.”* Let’s give a round of applause to thank God for the empty tomb. (Encourage the audience to applaud as the model returns back to stand before the audience.)

Narrator 1: Our third featured resurrection bonnet is the butterfly bonnet. (Cue the person wearing the bonnet with the butterfly to walk around the audience to model it.) The butterfly, which beautifully emerges from its cocoon tomb, has become an Easter symbol of Christ when He triumphantly rose from death. The butterfly also serves as a reminder of the new and better covenant which emerged as a result of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Ephesians 2:4–5 says, *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our*

trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved. And in 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read: *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Let's give a round of applause to thank God for making us new creations through Holy Baptism. (Encourage the audience to applaud as the model returns back to stand before the audience.)

Narrator 2: Our fourth resurrection bonnet is the egg bonnet. (Cue the person wearing the bonnet with the plastic eggs to walk around the audience to model it.) Although eggs, like butterflies, are not referred to as a resurrection symbol in the Bible, they have become an important part of our Easter celebrations. The open egg shell is a reminder of the open tomb, especially after a chick is born and leaves the egg. The chick itself symbolizes new life which pertains to Christ rising from the dead and also to our new birth in Christ. Holy Scripture describes it this way: *According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1 Peter 1:3b). Easter egg hunts can also symbolize the women who went to the tomb and searched for Jesus on the first Easter morning. Let's again thank God with our applause for the new, eternal life we receive through faith in Jesus, our Lord and Savior. (Encourage the audience to applaud as the model returns back to stand before the audience.)

Narrator 1: Our last resurrection bonnet in our resurrection parade is the faith bonnet. (Cue the person wearing the bonnet with the dove to walk around the audience to model it.) You probably think of the dove as more of a symbol for Pentecost than Easter, but it is also part of the Easter story. Without the Holy Spirit, whom the dove represents, we could not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Without the Holy Spirit working in us, we could not be witnesses of the Easter message. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts to give us the courage, just as He gave Mary Magdalene on the first Easter morning, to go and tell the Good News that Jesus is risen! By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can triumphantly proclaim, "Alleluia! Jesus lives!" Let's stand and praise God for the Gospel message that we are saved from sin, death, and the devil through faith in Jesus alone. (Encourage the audience to applaud as the model returns back to stand before the audience.)

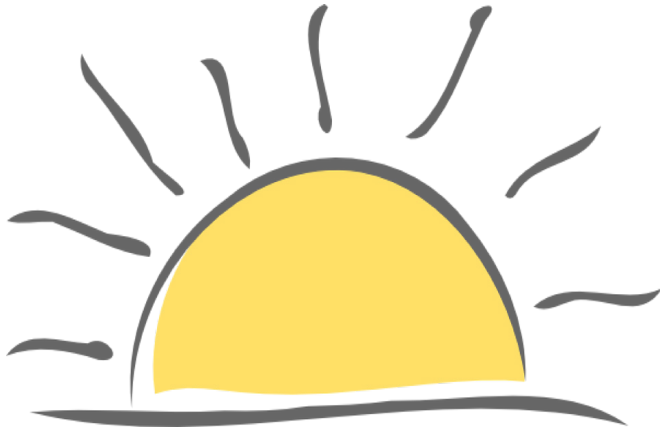
Narrator 2: We pray: Dear risen Lord Jesus, Your resurrection changed everything for us. After giving Your life to rescue us from our sins, You rose from the dead and conquered our greatest enemies, sin, death, and the devil, for us. By the power of the Holy Spirit Whom You sent to be our Helper, may we joyously proclaim that because You live, we, too, live forever! In Your triumphant name we pray. Amen.

All sing: "Resurrection Parade." (As the singing begins, the bonnet models take one last walk around the audience, then exit.)

A Resurrection Parade
Sketch/Short Program
Written by Patti Thies, Ankeny, Iowa
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019

Resurrection Parade Bonnet Patterns (Enlarge for use)

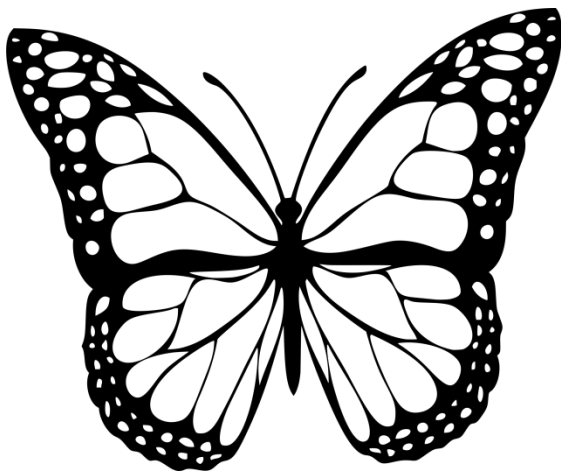
Sunrise Pattern



Empty Tomb Pattern



Butterfly Pattern



Dove Pattern



“Resurrection Parade”

In your Easter bonnet with Easter joy upon it,
You'll be a glowing witness of the Resurrection!
From L.A. to Dover, when people look you over,
They'll know Jesus did something special for us.

On the avenues, streets, and roads, too,
Many will see God's love for us found in Jesus who died and rose to save all.
So, proudly wear your bonnet, with Easter joy upon it
And share it with all people near and far 'round the world.



How To Be A New Mom Mentor Devotion

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up (1Thessalonians 5:11a).

There is no greater transformation in a woman's life than becoming a mother. Becoming a new mom happens in a variety of ways. She may have patiently waited as her child grew in her womb or patiently waited for an adoption placement call. She may have labored long and painfully or enjoyed an uneventful birth. She may have anxiously hoped for her baby for a long time, or had a life-changing surprise. No matter the circumstances, becoming a mother radically changes a woman's body, heart, and soul forever. Like all great changes, however, it does not happen swiftly or easily.

God in His wisdom uniquely designed women to undergo this metamorphosis. He designed a mother's body to recover, however slowly, from the extreme demands of pregnancy and labor. God gives mothers sensitive ears that hear a baby's quietest coo. He gives mothers a fierce and instinctual desire to protect their little one. He gives mothers the mental and physical reserves to survive a year or more of constantly interrupted sleep. God even helps moms survive the torrent of hormones that bind them to their child yet make them seem bonkers to everyone else. All of these and more are part of the way our profoundly wise God designed women to become mothers.

There is another way in which God has uniquely gifted women: we have an overwhelming need for friendship. We desire the close, deep, and detailed friendship of other women, especially when we face a monumental change in our lives like the transition to motherhood.

Whether you yourself have experienced the call of motherhood in your life or not, you can shower affection and support on the new moms around you. God has placed them in your life so that you may mutually bless and support each other, for He is honored and glorified when we are encouraging and supportive.

Like the sisters in Luke 10, there are both "Mary" ways to help a new mom and "Martha" ways. The practical, "Martha" ways to mentor new moms are to give items such as diapers, wipes, and food/gift cards, or to give your time cleaning her home. The "Mary" ways are intangible: emotional support such as attentive listening or the gentle sharing of memories of your own mothering days to ease a new mom's fears and to answer her questions. You might also point out how the Lord is working in her to grow her spiritually through her vocation as a mom as He shapes her to be more patient, loving, and gentle. When you speak to a new mom, resist the temptation to say things like "Oh, it goes so quickly" or "Enjoy it while you can." An exhausted new mom does not want to relish in the fatigue, sleep deprivation, or frustration of those early days. Soon enough, she will understand the truth of those phrases, but to say them now is more frustrating than encouraging.

Whether you are a "Mary" or a "Martha", God can use you to be a powerful source of strength, comfort, and joy to a new mom.

How to Be a New-Mom Mentor
Written by Ashley Tieman, Memphis, TN
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Mentoring New Moms

Bible Study

In honor of all the faithful women who have been an encouragement to mothers in LCMS pews: past, present, and future. May the Word of God and the compassion of these women inspire us to serve our sisters in Christ who are raising little ones in the faith.

[Please Provide: copies of the Bible study including the coloring page, Bibles, colored pencils or markers (optional)]

Can you recall attending a Sunday church service, seated near a family with a newborn or little ones? How often do the cries of babies interrupt your focus or the caretaking of infants distract you from the service? How do you respond to the above situations? Are you indifferent, annoyed, or do you offer a helping hand? _____

Whether you are a seasoned mother with wisdom to share, or have no children of your own, God uses women in all walks of life to be mentors. In this study, we will focus particularly on mentoring new moms. We will also consider three different ways to encourage new moms physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

One of the many intimidating obstacles a new mother encounters is adapting to Sunday morning service. "Some Sundays feel like I am in a circus ...," confessed one mother. For many new moms, post-partum participation in worship and fellowship is, unfortunately, a commitment that is often neglected. The devil tempts and draws her away by preying on her feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and fear of embarrassment. God has given each of us spiritual gifts, and one of the ways we are called to serve is by gladly using our gifts to mentor the new mom sitting next to us. Don't let that pew become empty; let it be filled with the laughter – and cries – of little children: for they are the next generation of believers and mentors!

Read together 1 Thessalonians 5:11a: *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up.*

What words from this verse immediately speak to you? _____

The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes *encourage* as an action meaning: "to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope; to spur on; to give help or patronage to" (www.merriam-webster.com).

Opening Prayer: Benevolent Father, we take time together to reflect on Your Word and what it means to be an encouragement to the new mothers who share pews with us. Guide our discussion to be edifying and open our hearts to ways we can serve these sisters in Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

Physical Encouragement

My first “weekend away” as a new mom was to a district LWML convention. Of course, I brought my son along (he was only six weeks old), and I was instantly embraced in a purple hug of support! At any given moment, I had dozens of fellow moms, sisters, and grandmas ready and willing to hold my infant. They blessed me by freeing my hands to take notes during Bible study, shop at the resource stores, and eat dinner. By these loving actions, I was physically built up and not abandoned during my first time away from home and husband.

Read Ruth 3:1–5, 16–18 and 4:13–16.

To whom was Naomi a mentor? _____

What physical encouragement did Naomi provide to Ruth? _____

Considering the story of Ruth and Naomi as a whole, how did God work through the birth of Obed to bless both women? _____

How could you provide physical encouragement to a new mother? _____

Emotional Encouragement

A friend of mine recently shared how two women in her congregation stepped up to help her after her son was born. “They reassure me that my relationship with my husband is important. They give me an opportunity to gain my sanity back. They validate my fears and they help me find new solutions. They invest in me.”

Motherhood is full of emotional ups and downs. That new mom who “snuck in” halfway through the worship service might be experiencing joyful relief at being in the house of the Lord, or she may be barely holding it together! Many first-time moms do not have family or friends nearby and suffer emotionally from a lack of local support.

Read Luke 1:36–45, 56.

With whom did Mary stay? _____

How did her stay with Elizabeth provide Mary with emotional encouragement? _____

Through the Holy Spirit, Mary received encouragement to visit Elizabeth. As Mary’s mentor, how was Elizabeth emotionally blessed? _____

New mothers may not have a support group of family, close neighbors, or Christian co-workers. How can her church family provide support for her in her vocation as a Christian mother?

What are some ways you could provide emotional encouragement to a new mother? _____

Spiritual Encouragement

A young mom was asked how other women in her congregation could lend support to her during her transition into her new vocation of mother. She responded: "Be joyful I am at church. Notice me and encourage me to keep coming. Use Scripture to build me up and pour Jesus' love into me."

Looking back on my childhood, I can recall many women in our congregation who graciously invested in my spiritual well-being. They were Sunday school and midweek school teachers, leaders of Christian Education, VBS volunteers, and faithful friends to my family. However, before they were inspirations to me, they were spiritual mentors to my mother. Some of them were there to witness me being brought to the waters of Holy Baptism. Each time a little one becomes a child of God, we, along with parents and sponsors, vow to nurture that child in the faith and support the parents in the child's spiritual upbringing.

Read 2 Timothy 1:5. In a heavily patriarchal culture, who in this verse are being praised as spiritual mentors? _____

Read 2 Timothy 1:3–5. Who wrote these words and said that he was encouraged by Timothy's faithful upbringing? _____

How was God glorified through the examples of Lois and Eunice? _____

In the pews around you, who needs to hear that, with the power of the Holy Spirit and His gifts, she is nurturing her child in the Christian faith? _____

How could you provide spiritual encouragement to a new mother? _____

"Some Sundays feel like I am in a circus. I don't always listen to the sermon, I can't always tell you what the readings were for that Sunday, but I can tell you that we were in church together as a family." When she is there, this mom hears God's words of forgiveness and receives His grace through Word and Sacrament. This is why we need to mentor new moms: so they are encouraged physically to attend worship, are built up emotionally to feel loved, and are inspired spiritually to stay strong in the faith.

There will always be challenges, temptations, and excuses for new moms not to come to church. Don't be one of them. It is in God's House that we all receive His good gifts of Word and Sacrament. Be full of love and forgiveness, just as He, in His mercy, loves and forgives you.

Read responsively these verses from 1 Thessalonians 5:11a, 14–19, 21b–24.

Leader: *And we urge you ... admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all* (v. 14).

Group: *Encourage one another and build one another up* (v.11a).

Leader: *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone* (v.15).

Group: *Encourage one another and build one another up.*

Leader: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (vv.16–18).

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Leader: *Do not quench the Spirit... hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil* (vv.19, 21b,22).

Group: *Encourage one another and build one another up.*

Leader: Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.

All: Come, Lord Jesus!

Closing Prayer: Father and Creator, You bless our midst with precious little ones and entrust us with the care of new mothers. Open opportunities for us to mentor these women, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Convict us, through Your Holy Spirit, to encourage them with our God-given gifts so that they might be built up in You. Thank You for allowing us to meet together as sisters in Christ and help us to serve You with gladness! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Challenge:

Identify a new mom in your congregation or small women's group. Write a note to her as you pray for her. Then, mail or hand deliver the finished note of encouragement to her and let her know you are praying for her.

A Final Thought: Does your congregation have a moms' group? A women's Bible study group? An LWML circle that is "new mom" friendly? If not, consider creating one and using it as an outreach opportunity to build-up the bonds between the women of your church and community. New moms need a safe, positive environment where they will have "adult time" with other moms. They need to be refueled by Christian fellowship and Bible study and to be encouraged to use their spiritual gifts. Make sure to offer childcare!

(A heartfelt “thank you” to the three amazing, first-time, Lutheran mommas who took the time to share their postpartum pew experiences with me in order to edify this study. They are my mentors.)

Mentoring New Moms
Written by Alli Bauck, Olathe, KS
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Mentoring New Moms

Bible Study

Leader's Guide

In honor of all the faithful women who have been an encouragement to mothers in LCMS pews: past, present, and future. May the Word of God and the compassion of these women inspire us to serve our sisters in Christ who are raising little ones in the faith.

[Please Provide: copies of the Bible study including the coloring page, Bibles, colored pencils or markers (optional)]

Can you recall attending a Sunday church service, seated near a family with a newborn or little ones? How often do the cries of babies interrupt your focus or the caretaking of infants distract you from the service? How do you respond to the above situations? Are you indifferent, annoyed, or do you offer a helping hand? Encourage participants to share their honest responses.

Whether you are a seasoned mother with wisdom to share, or have no children of your own, God uses women in all walks of life to be mentors. In this study, we will focus particularly on mentoring new moms. We will also consider three different ways to encourage new moms physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

One of the many intimidating obstacles a new mother encounters is adapting to Sunday morning service. "Some Sundays feel like I am in a circus ...," confessed one mother. For many new moms, post-partum participation in worship and fellowship is, unfortunately, a commitment that is often neglected. The devil tempts and draws her away by preying on her feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and fear of embarrassment. God has given each of us spiritual gifts and one of the ways we are called to serve is by gladly using our gifts to mentor the new mom sitting next to us. Don't let that pew become empty; let it be filled with the laughter – and cries – of little children: for they are the next generation of believers and mentors!

Read together 1 Thessalonians 5:11a: *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up.*

What words from this verse immediately speak to you? Encourage participants to share their thoughts.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes *encourage* as an action meaning: "to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope; to spur on; to give help or patronage to" (www.merriam-webster.com).

Opening Prayer: Benevolent Father, we take time together to reflect on Your Word and what it means to be an encouragement to the new mothers who share pews with us. Guide our discussion to be edifying and open our hearts to ways we can serve these sisters in Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

Physical Encouragement

My first "weekend away" as a new mom was to a district LWML convention. Of course, I brought my son along (he was only six weeks old), and I was instantly embraced in a purple hug of

support! At any given moment, I had dozens of fellow moms, sisters, and grandmas ready and willing to hold my infant. They blessed me by freeing my hands to take notes during Bible study, shop at the resource stores, and eat dinner. By these loving actions, I was physically built up and not abandoned during my first time away from home and husband.

Read Ruth 3:1–5, 16–18 and 4:13–16.

To whom was Naomi a mentor? Naomi was a mentor to Ruth, her daughter-in-law.

What physical encouragement did Naomi provide to Ruth? Naomi took Obed, Ruth's son, and cared for him like he was her own child.

Considering the story of Ruth and Naomi as a whole, how did God work through the birth of Obed to bless both women? As described in Ruth 1, Ruth was a foreigner who was without physical support after the death of her husband. Naomi, Ruth's God-fearing mother-in-law, was left empty and bitter after the deaths of her husband and two sons. However, God was faithful and provided for Ruth and Naomi through the union of Ruth to their kinsman redeemer, Boaz. Ruth and Boaz were blessed with the birth of a son, who is included in the lineage of Christ and who carried on God's promise to send a Savior. Naomi was blessed through the redemption of her family line by an heir, Obed, and was no longer "empty" but full because of God's actions in her life.

How could you provide physical encouragement to a new mother? Answers may vary. Examples include bring a meal to a new mom, help her carry things as she enters and exits church, babysit, hold her baby so she can have free hands, sit with her in church.

Emotional Encouragement

A friend of mine recently shared how two women in her congregation stepped up to help her after her son was born. "They reassure me that my relationship with my husband is important. They give me an opportunity to gain my sanity back. They validate my fears and they help me find new solutions. They invest in me."

Motherhood is full of emotional ups and downs. That new mom who "snuck in" halfway through the worship service might be experiencing joyful relief at being in the house of the Lord, or she may be barely holding it together! Many first-time moms do not have family or friends nearby and suffer emotionally from a lack of local support.

Read Luke 1:36–45, 56.

With whom did Mary stay? Mary stayed with her relative, Elizabeth.

How did her stay with Elizabeth provide Mary with emotional encouragement? If Mary had remained at home during her first trimester of pregnancy, she would likely have lived with doubt and fear. Elizabeth, being further along in her pregnancy, likely would have offered advice and aid as Mary experienced her first trimester.

Through the Holy Spirit, Mary received encouragement to visit Elizabeth. As Mary's mentor, how was Elizabeth emotionally blessed? Elizabeth had been given the miraculous gift of conceiving a son in her old age. The Holy Spirit revealed to Elizabeth that the child Mary carried was the Lord (v.43). Through her joy and steadfast faith in the Lord, she was blessed to mentor Mary who would be the mother of the Messiah.

New mothers may not have a support group of family, close neighbors, or Christian co-workers. How can her church family provide support for her in her vocation as a Christian mother?

Members of the church can provide support for new mothers by making them feel safe and not judged. They can ask her how she is doing and can extend kindness to her as she encounters the demands of her new vocation.

What are some ways you could provide emotional encouragement to a new mother?

Ideas include give a new mom a hug, ask how she is doing, lend a listening ear, offer her words of affirmation.

Spiritual Encouragement

A young mom was asked how other women in her congregation could lend support to her during her transition into her new vocation of mother. She responded: "Be joyful I am at church. Notice me and encourage me to keep coming. Use Scripture to build me up and pour Jesus' love into me."

Looking back on my childhood, I can recall many women in our congregation who graciously invested in my spiritual well-being. They were Sunday school and midweek school teachers, leaders of Christian Education, VBS volunteers, and faithful friends to my family. However, before they were inspirations to me, they were spiritual mentors to my mother. Some of them were there to witness me being brought to the waters of Holy Baptism. Each time a little one becomes a child of God, we, along with parents and sponsors, vow to nurture that child in the faith and support the parents in the child's spiritual upbringing.

Read 2 Timothy 1:5. In a heavily patriarchal culture, who in this verse are being praised as spiritual mentors? The author praised two women: Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

Read 2 Timothy 1:3–5. Who wrote these words and said that he was encouraged by Timothy's faithful upbringing? The apostle Paul wrote these words in a letter to Timothy.

How was God glorified through the examples of Lois and Eunice? The Holy Spirit worked faith in Lois and Eunice and worked in them to share their faith in the Triune God with Timothy. Led by the Holy Spirit, both women nurtured Timothy in the one true faith. God was glorified through the Christian witness of these two women.

In the pews around you, who needs to hear that, with the power of the Holy Spirit and His gifts, she is nurturing her child in the Christian faith? Encourage participants to suggest individuals they can spiritually encourage.

How could you provide spiritual encouragement to a new mother? Examples include pray for a new mom, be an advocate for young families in the church, encourage a new mom to continue to attend worship, encourage her with Scripture and Christian devotions such as Mustard Seeds .

"Some Sundays feel like I am in a circus. I don't always listen to the sermon, I can't always tell you what the readings were for that Sunday, but I can tell you that we were in church together as a family." When she is there, this mom hears God's words of forgiveness and receives His grace through Word and Sacrament. This is why we need to mentor new moms: so they are encouraged physically to attend worship, are built up emotionally to feel loved, and are inspired spiritually to stay strong in the faith.

There will always be challenges, temptations, and excuses for new moms not to come to church. Don't be one of them. It is in God's House that we all receive His good gifts of Word and Sacrament. Be full of love and forgiveness, just as He, in His mercy, loves and forgives you.

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All: Come, Lord Jesus!

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Challenge:

Identify a new mom in your congregation or small women's group. Write a note to her as you pray for her. Then, mail or hand deliver the finished note of encouragement to her and let her know you are praying for her.

A Final Thought: Does your congregation have a moms' group? A women's Bible study group? An LWML circle that is "new mom" friendly? If not, consider creating one and using it as an outreach opportunity to build-up the bonds between the women of your church and community. New moms need a safe, positive environment where they will have "adult time" with other moms. They need to be refueled by Christian fellowship and Bible study and to be encouraged to use their spiritual gifts. Make sure to offer childcare!

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They are my mentors.)

Mentoring New Moms
Leader’s Guide
Written by Alli Bauck, Olathe, KS
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Faithful Mates Devotion

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ... In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (Ephesians 5:25, 28).

When I was a young child, I lived 15 hours from my grandparents' homes in the rural town of Wartburg, Illinois. Since we only saw them once or twice a year, it was a special treat to visit. I'll never forget the anticipation I felt as the car rounded the last corner onto the gravel road, and fell into place in the well-worn grooves of the driveway. Dust flew, cicadas hummed, cornstalks waved hello, and the tall, stately white farm house porch emerged from the darkness. Hundreds of bugs swarmed around the porch light and once through them, we were welcomed by grandma's wet kisses and a piping hot, homemade breakfast bonanza just as the clock signaled a new day.

My husband and I have moved 15 times in our 20-year marriage, so no house holds that same nostalgic magic, but I still have that special, welcome feeling from my grandparents' homes wherever my husband and I call "home." In our home, one thing is constant—the peaceful, comfortable feeling of having a trustworthy, loving spouse with whom I can share each day of the year. My husband's arms may not always be there to welcome me with a warm hug or kiss because he's working late ... again. He may not have supper ready for me when I come home or even have time to help with the dishes. And he may be too pre-occupied with a task to remember to leave the light on for me (or get to any of the jobs on my "honey-do" list). But I still know that my husband always loves me, cares about me, and is faithful to me.

Finding a life-long mate is a gift from God. A marriage is not without its long and tiresome journeys, dusty and dirty roads, and annoying circumstances that may bug or even hurt you. But a loyal husband vows companionship and care, and a peace-filled wife finds comfort in his promise.

God commands husbands to *love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her ... in the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself* (Ephesians 5:25, 28). Just as a house provides families with structure, safety, and protection, godly husbands provide care and support for their spouses and children. Having been given faith in Christ and love for Him in his heart at Holy Baptism, a Christian husband shows the self-sacrificing love of Christ as he willingly will do anything to provide for his wife and children. The peace that comes from the love of such a husband is one of the greatest earthly blessings that God gives to a woman.

Our ultimate peace, however, comes from knowing that Jesus, the Church's bridegroom, has given His life for His bride, the Church. Jesus, our Bridegroom, has pledged to never leave us nor forsake us. Jesus, our Bridegroom, has clothed us *with the garments of salvation* and has covered us *with the robe of righteousness* (Isaiah 61:10). We could never want or desire greater care than what Jesus provides. As we daily flip open well-worn pages of the Bible, recall familiar Bible stories and passages, and regularly feast on Jesus' body and blood at Holy Communion, we are reminded of the security and support Jesus provides us, now and always. Through Word

and Sacrament, we are strengthened by Jesus' sacrificing love for us and are enabled to show that same kind of love to our spouse and to all of our loved ones.

A life-long union between a husband and his wife brings each spouse comfort and joy. Our eternal life-long union with God which began when we were baptized, gives us the perfect comfort and joy that only our trustworthy God can give.

My prayer is that your love for God grows each day and His promises to you never cease to bring you peace and joy. May you look forward with anticipation to the day when you are welcomed to your heavenly home, into the loving arms of your Bridegroom, who has spared no expense in preparing a magnificent wedding banquet and an eternal, life-long home for the one He loves, YOU!

Prayer: Jesus, may the ways You show us love never cease to amaze us and bring us comfort and security each day of our lives. May our love for You and peace in Your care for us increase more and more over the years. Thank You for Your love and companionship that will never end. Thank You for Christian husbands who show Your love and care to their wives. Lead us to appreciate their faithfulness and loving care as precious gifts from You. Amen.

Faithful Mates

Written by: Brenda Trunkhill, Fremont, California

Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



God's Purposes for Marriage

Bible Study

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, and copies of the *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB).]

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, we praise and honor You for instituting marriage to be a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church. Forgive us for the many ways we have fallen short in marriage and family life. We ask that You bless all homes in our land, that they may be shelters for the defenseless, a fortress for the tempted, a resting place for the weary, and a foretaste of our eternal home with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

To Begin

If you have been or are now married, how did you go about looking for a life-long mate? _____

According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, the average age for first marriages for U.S. women in 2017 was 27.4 years old. For men, it's 29.5 years old. In 1990, the average age of marriage for U.S. women was 24 years old; in 1980 it was 22 years old, and in the 1950's, it was 20 years old ("This Is The Average Age of Marriage Right Now," Macaela MacKenzie, *Women's Health*, March 26, 2018). Why do you think the average age for first marriages has increased? _____

If you were 18-years-old and looking for a spouse, what top three qualities would you seek?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What do you think are the two or three main reasons why God instituted marriage?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Searching Scripture

Read "Holy Matrimony," Lutheran Service Book (LSB), page 275.

The first purpose of marriage is to be a picture of the communion between Christ and His _____.

Read Ephesians 5:22–33.

- a) In contrast to the culture of that day, husbands are taught not to _____ their wives, but to love them.
- b) The purpose of Christ dying for His bride was to _____ her.
- c) To be without spot or wrinkle is to be _____.
- d) The first assignment of the Church and of earthly brides is to _____ her husband's sacrificial love.
- e) What does it mean for a husband to leave his father and mother? _____

True or False: The ultimate purpose of earthly marriage is to give glory to God. _____

The second purpose of marriage is for _____ help and support that each person ought to receive from the other, both in prosperity and _____.

Read Proverbs 31:10–31.

What do we learn from the following verses about a wife with noble character:

- a) Verse 11: _____
- b) Verse 12: _____
- c) Verses 13–27: _____
- d) Verses 28–29: _____
- e) Verses 30–31: _____

Read Proverbs 1:7. According to this verse, the beginning of knowledge is _____

How is this kind of knowledge (wisdom) beneficial in marriage? _____

The third purpose of marriage is to find a Christ-centered _____ in each other. Read Judges 14:1–3. Name three mistakes Samson made when he searched for a life-long mate.

In what ways do a Christian husband and wife “delight” in each other? _____

Why is such delight an important part of marriage? _____

Read Colossians 3:12–17.

Virtues are not ours to accomplish, but are _____

Why should we forgive others? _____

Why bear with each other? _____

Why be patient and kind with each other? _____

Why love one another? _____

Why serve one another? _____

Why are the virtues described in Colossians 3:12–13 so important in marriage? _____

The fourth purpose of marriage is for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the _____ and _____ of the Lord.

How do the Bible passages referred to in the first three purposes of marriage aid in the raising of children who fear and love the Lord? _____

Sing: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” LSB 649, TLH 975, LW 464

Closing Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, we pray for all who search for a life-long mate in these days. Work in their hearts a confidence that You work everything out for the good of those who love You. Help them to be patient, wise, and mature in the choices they make. Help them to flee youthful lusts and to find their refuge and strength in You and You alone. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

God’s Purposes for Marriage
Written by Pastor Larry Griffin, Janesville, MN
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League 2019



God's Purposes for Marriage

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, and copies of the *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB).]

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, we praise and honor You for instituting marriage to be a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church. Forgive us for the many ways we have fallen short in marriage and family life. We ask that You bless all homes in our land, that they may be shelters for the defenseless, a fortress for the tempted, a resting place for the weary, and a foretaste of our eternal home with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

To Begin

If you have been or are now married, how did you go about looking for a life-long mate?

Encourage participants to share.

According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, the average age for first marriages for U.S. women in 2017 was 27.4 years old. For men, it's 29.5 years old. In 1990, the average age of marriage for U.S. women was 24 years old; in 1980 it was 22 years old, and in the 1950's, it was 20 years old ("This Is The Average Age of Marriage Right Now," Macaela MacKenzie, *Women's Health*, March 26, 2018). Possible reasons include individuals focusing on careers, removal of many of the societal stigmas for living together outside of marriage, getting a college degree may take a person until their mid-20's, women are now better able to support themselves.

If you were 18-years-old and looking for a spouse, what top three qualities would you seek?

Answers will vary. Hopefully participants will include that their spouse is a Christian.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What do you think are the two or three main reasons why God instituted marriage? Answers will include for companionship, and to have children.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Searching Scripture

Read "Holy Matrimony," Lutheran Service Book (LSB), page 275.

The first purpose of marriage is to be a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church.

Read Ephesians 5:22–33.

- f) In contrast to the culture of that day, husbands are taught not to rule their wives, but to love them.
- g) The purpose of Christ dying for His bride was to sanctify her.
- h) To be without spot or wrinkle is to be forgiven.
- i) The first assignment of the Church and of earthly brides is to receive gratefully her husband's sacrificial love.
- j) What does it mean for a husband to leave his father and mother? Answers will include that a husband now puts first his wife and establishes his own family unit. However, he still loves and honors his parents.

True or False: The ultimate purpose of earthly marriage is to give glory to God. True.

The second purpose of marriage is for the mutual companionship, help, and support that each person ought to receive from the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

Read Proverbs 31:10–31.

What do we learn from the following verses about a wife with noble character:

- f) Verse 11: She is trustworthy.
- g) Verse 12: She is supportive and encouraging.
- h) Verses 13–27: She is industrious. She cares for her household and she cares about others in need. She is pictured as energetic, happy, and optimistic. She enjoys life and does her work with vigor. She goes out of her way to obtain the best for her family. She respects her husband.
- i) Verses 28–29: Her family praises her.
- j) Verses 30–31: Outward beauty is fleeting. What comes from fearing God lasts a lifetime and beyond.

Read Proverbs 1:7. According to this verse, the beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord. “Fear” in this instance means “respect and trust.”

How is this kind of knowledge (wisdom) beneficial in marriage? A Christian husband and wife share a common faith in Christ as members of God's family through Holy Baptism. When a husband and wife respect and trust in the Lord, they together turn to Him for knowledge and wisdom in all situations. Their decisions are guided by God's Word. Their love for one another is modeled after the love that Christ shows us.

The third purpose of marriage is to find a Christ-centered delight in each other.

Read Judges 14:1–3. Name three mistakes Samson made when he searched for a life-long mate.

1. Samson disrespected his parents' authority.
2. Samson disobeyed God by marrying outside of Israel.
3. Samson focused on the outward beauty of women instead of on whether or not they feared God.

In what ways do a Christian husband and wife “delight” in each other? A Christian husband and wife love, honor, and respect each other. They enjoy being together. They work together as one for the welfare of each other and of their children. They rejoice together when they are blessed. They support one another in difficult situations. Together they serve God. God also gifts them with a physical relationship to enjoy.

Why is such delight an important part of marriage? The delight with which God blesses them binds them together as one in Him.

Read Colossians 3:12–17.

Virtues are not ours to accomplish, but are gifts of God.

Why should we forgive others? We forgive others because Christ forgave us first.

Why bear with each other? We bear with each other because Christ bears with us.

Why be patient and kind with each other? We are patient and kind with each other because God is patient and kind toward us.

Why love one another? We love one another because in Christ, God loved us first.

Why serve one another? We serve one another because in Christ, God serves us first through the preaching of the Word and in the Sacraments.

Why are the virtues described in Colossians 3:12–13 so important in marriage? These virtues are the same ones our perfect Savior Jesus shows us. They are the foundation of respect between people. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they are what enable a husband and his wife to communicate effectively with one another, to solve and resolve problems together, and to forgive one another.

The fourth purpose of marriage is for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord.

How do the Bible passages referred to in the first three purposes of marriage aid in the raising of children who love and fear the Lord? Parents who follow the wisdom and knowledge shared in these verses set an example for their children. They base their teaching and discipline on what God's Word says. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they show their children the love and forgiveness that Jesus shows us. In a world where for many being married is no longer important in the having and raising of children, it is important to remember that God has placed marriage before children. In His infinite wisdom and unending love for us, God has designed a loving, Christ-centered marriage to be the environment into which children are to be raised.

Sing: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” LSB 649, TLH 975, LW 464

Closing Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, we pray for all who search for a life-long mate in these days. Work in their hearts a confidence that You work everything out for the good of those who love You. Help them to be patient, wise, and mature in the choices they make. Help them to flee youthful lusts and to find their refuge and strength in You and You alone. In Jesus' name. Amen.

God's Purposes for Marriage

Leader's Guide

Written by Pastor Larry Griffin, Janesville, MN

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League 2019



Be Happy, Don't Worry Devotion

(Note: This devotion could also be used as a mini-Bible study.)

[Please provide: hymnals, copies of Matthew 6:25–34 that follows this devotion]

Opening Hymn: Sing or say verses 1–2 of “Children of the Heavenly Father” LSB 725.

[Jesus said,] *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”* (Matthew 6:34a).

Are you worried? When you listen to today’s news, you may hear about another shooting at a school, workplace, or public venue. In such tragedies, some may have died, many may be injured and many lives may be changed forever. Do you worry that the next public event you attend will become a massacre by some individual who decides to shoot into the crowd? What will you do? Who will you turn to?

Wildfires rage in many western states. When the Santa Rosa, California area was devastated by one of the biggest and deadliest fires in California history, its local news shared the devastating stories of individuals who were left homeless. The fire did not discriminate as individuals in all socioeconomic levels were impacted. Santa Rosa once prided itself in controlling the homeless population within its city borders. This fire changed that status. Due to the demand, hotels only reserved rooms for one night at a time. Whole families stayed in one room with strangers who opened their homes to help. Many people were left with nothing. Lives were changed forever. Do you think those impacted were worried?

Or perhaps you personally are worried about the economy, crime, violence, your health or the health of your loved ones?

What does Jesus, our Lord and Savior say about worry? (*Hand out sheets with Matthew 6:25–34.*) Let’s read out loud together His reassuring promise.

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

What does Jesus say about worry? (See verse 25.) Jesus says, “Do not worry.”

According to Jesus, does worrying have any benefits? (See verse 27.) No. Jesus says that worry adds no extra time to our life.

What else happens to us when we worry? When we worry, our focus strays away from Jesus and from depending upon His power to help us.

What does Jesus say concerning clothing? (See verses 28–30.) Jesus says that if God “clothes” plants, how much more will He clothe you.

Reread verses 31–32. Why do we not have to worry about what we shall eat or drink or what we shall wear? God knows what we need and will provide for us.

Instead of worrying, what does God want us to do? (See verse 33.) God wants us to first seek Him and His righteousness that is found through faith in Christ Jesus alone.

Do you have any worries to turn over to the Lord? Take time to silently pray about these now.

How can you help individuals in similar situations to those mentioned at the beginning of this devotion as they face difficult circumstances? How might you share Jesus’ words about worry with them?

Closing Hymn: Sing or say verses 3–4 of “Children of the Heavenly Father” LSB 725.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we come before You this day humbly asking You to care for our every need. Let our trust be in You and our eyes on the cross. Thank You for all we have, for we know it is You who makes all we have possible. Help us to find value in You, instead of in what we will wear, eat, or drink. Continue to show us how to serve those who have encountered devastating events in their life. Help us to share the comfort found in Your Word with them as we assist them with physical and emotional needs. In Jesus’ name we pray as He has taught us.... (conclude with The Lord’s Prayer).

Be Happy, Don’t Worry
Written by Tina Landskroener, Quincy, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019

Matthew 6:25–34

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”



Encountering “What ifs” on the Expressway of Life

Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this Bible study, Bibles, hymnals, and musical accompaniment]

Sing: “Consider How the Birds Above,” LSB # 736

Prayer: Dear Lord God, heavenly Father, guide us today as we study Your Word. Prepare our hearts and minds to acknowledge the sins of worry and anxiety and to come to You for forgiveness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, refresh us in the study of Your Word as You lead us to look to You and to Your care for us. Give each of us guidance to turn our cares over to You as we trust in the Good News of our salvation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Expressways allow motor vehicles to move quickly from one place to another. But “what if” excessive amounts of merging vehicles, roadblocks, accidents, vehicle breakdowns, and other unexpected issues occur? These events can limit or even stop the normal flow of traffic.

Our fast paced lives can be compared to an expressway. As we merge onto the expressway of life, any number of “what ifs” can occur that limit or stop our plans. What if as you plan your wedding, your future spouse’s deployment halfway around the world is extended? What if as you prepare for the birth of your child, the doctors indicate there are complications? What if as you prepare to leave for college on a scholarship, you wonder if you can study, work, make friends, and keep your grades up? What are some “what ifs” that you face today?

In every life, there are always “what ifs.” Your personal “what ifs” might include such life-changing events as a move to a new community due to a job change, a change in marital status due to divorce or the death of a spouse, or a retirement after many years of hard work. Then there are the daily “what ifs” as you care for your family, go to work, shop for groceries, take the car in for repairs, mow the lawn, plant a garden, shovel snow, visit your doctor, as well as medical diagnoses and procedures which frighten us. These are just the tip of the iceberg of our busy lives and the “what ifs” that affect us.

When “what ifs” on the expressway of life overwhelm us, we may become worried and anxious. As our sinful natures cause us to turn inward to look for answers, we may wonder if we will have time to accomplish everything ahead of us in our daily lives. We may wonder if a relationship will develop or dissolve. We may wonder if the medical advice and procedures will grant us a cure. Worry and anxiety over “what ifs” and over actual problems we face can consume our time and energy. These emotions may become so overwhelming that they cause us to take our eyes off of God and forget His love and care for us as well as His control over all things.

To help us face life’s “what ifs,” let’s turn to God’s Word for guidance.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:34a).

What does this key verse mean to you as you encounter worry and anxiety on the expressway of life? _____

Some Natural, Physical, And Relationship Roadblocks That Can Cause Worry And Anxiety

There are many roadblocks and breakdowns on the expressway of life that can cause us to be anxious and worried. Read the verses listed below. Identify the cause of anxiety described in each one as either natural, physical, or interpersonal (relationship-based).

2 Samuel 6:16: _____

2 Samuel 15:13–14: _____

2 Kings 6:15: _____

Mark 5:21–24, 35: _____

Luke 2:46–48: _____

Luke 8:22–25: _____

Luke 12:22–26: _____

Romans 16:17: _____

Which of the events above make you worried and anxious? _____

How do your worry and anxiety levels change when such events happen not to you but to your loved ones? _____

How Do Worry And Anxiety Affect Us?

Read the verses below. What physical or mental effect of worry and anxiety on us does each one describe?

Proverbs 12:25a: _____

Ecclesiastes 2:22–23: _____

Luke 21:34: _____

When have you experienced these same effects? _____

How did you deal with these effects? _____

Read 1 Kings 19:1–4. What very real threat did the prophet Elijah face which made him extremely worried and anxious? _____

What did this extreme worry and anxiety lead Elijah to want? _____

Read 1 Kings 19:5–21. God did not leave Elijah alone. How did God help him? _____

Fixing Our Focus On God As We Travel The Expressway Of Life

Initially, where was Elijah's focus? _____

What happens when we turn our focus inward to ourselves and not upward to God? _____

Read Jeremiah 17:5-8. How do these verses describe the difference between trust in ourselves or in other people and trust in God? _____

The following Scripture references provide welcoming exits for us when the "what ifs" on life's expressway overwhelm us. Read each reference and write down God's directions for us when worry and anxiety fill our hearts and minds.

Psalms 34:4–6: _____

Matthew 6:25–34: _____

2 Corinthians 1:8–10: _____

Philippians 4:5b–7: _____

1 Peter 5:7: _____

Read Psalm 46. Write down three phrases found in this psalm that tell of God's control over all the "what ifs" of this world. _____

Briefly tell about a time when remembering God's almighty power helped you as you faced worry and anxiety. _____

Name something specific that you can take from this study that will help you as you deal with the "what ifs" on the expressway of life. _____

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, through Your Son's death and resurrection, our salvation is won. Jesus has defeated sin, death, and the devil. Through faith in You, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. As our sinful nature struggles with concerns, worries, and anxieties, guide us into Your loving arms and the grace that abounds beyond measure. May the Holy Spirit teach us to bring all the cares that burden and weigh us down to Your feet and leave them there. May we have Your peace as we know and trust that You alone have the power to rescue and save us. In the blessed and holy name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Sing: “Entrust Your Days and Burdens,” LSB 754, LW 427

Encountering “What Ifs” on the Expressway of Life
Written by Kathy Johnson, Baxter, MN
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Encountering “What ifs” on the Expressway of Life

Bible Study
Leader’s Guide

[Please provide: copies of this Bible study, Bibles, hymnals, and musical accompaniment]

Sing: “Consider How the Birds Above,” LSB # 736

Prayer: Dear Lord God, heavenly Father, guide us today as we study Your Word. Prepare our hearts and minds to acknowledge the sins of worry and anxiety and to come to You for forgiveness. By the power of the Holy Spirit, refresh us in the study of Your Word as You lead us to look to You and to Your care for us. Give each of us guidance to turn our cares over to You as we trust in the Good News of our salvation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Expressways allow motor vehicles to move quickly from one place to another. But “what if” excessive amounts of merging vehicles, roadblocks, accidents, vehicle breakdowns, and other unexpected issues occur? These events can limit or even stop the normal flow of traffic.

Our fast paced lives can be compared to an expressway. As we merge onto the expressway of life, any number of “what ifs” can occur that limit or stop our plans. What if as you plan your wedding, your future spouse’s deployment halfway around the world is extended? What if as you prepare for the birth of your child, the doctors indicate there are complications? What if as you prepare to leave for college on a scholarship, you wonder if you can study, work, make friends, and keep your grades up? What are some “what ifs” that you face today? Encourage participants to share one or two “what ifs” they currently face.

In every life, there are always “what ifs.” Your personal “what ifs” might include such life-changing events as a move to a new community due to a job change, a change in marital status due to divorce or the death of a spouse, or a retirement after many years of hard work. Then there are the daily “what ifs” as you care for your family, go to work, shop for groceries, take the car in for repairs, mow the lawn, plant a garden, shovel snow, visit your doctor, as well as medical diagnoses and procedures which frighten us. These are just the tip of the iceberg of our busy lives and the “what ifs” that affect us.

When “what ifs” on the expressway of life overwhelm us, we may become worried and anxious. As our sinful natures cause us to turn inward to look for answers, we may wonder if we will have time to accomplish everything ahead of us in our daily lives. We may wonder if a relationship will develop or dissolve. We may wonder if the medical advice and procedures will grant us a cure. Worry and anxiety over “what ifs” and over actual problems we face can consume our time and energy. These emotions may become so overwhelming that they cause us to take our eyes off of God and cause us to forget His love and care for us as well as His control over all things.

To help us face life’s “what ifs,” let’s turn to God’s Word for guidance.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:34a).

What does this key verse mean to you as you encounter worry and anxiety on the expressway of life? This verse encourages us to look to God for what we need. As we trust in Him to give us “our daily bread,” He helps us not to worry about the future.

Some Natural, Physical, And Relationship Roadblocks That Can Cause Worry And Anxiety

There are many roadblocks and breakdowns on the expressway of life that can cause us to be anxious and worried. Read the verses listed below. Identify the cause of anxiety described in each one as either natural, physical, or interpersonal (relationship-based).

2 Samuel 6:16: interpersonal (the breakdown of marriages)

2 Samuel 15:13–14: interpersonal (dysfunction among family members)

2 Kings 6:15: interpersonal on a large scale (wars)

Mark 5:21–24, 35: physical (illness and physical death)

Luke 2:46–48: interpersonal (between parents and children)

Luke 8:22–25: natural (storms, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and the like)

Luke 12:22–26: physical (concerning physical needs)

Romans 16:17: interpersonal (among members within a church family)

Which of the events above make you worried and anxious? Encourage participants to share.

How do your worry and anxiety levels change when such events happen not to you but to your loved ones? As participants share, discuss how hurt and often helpless we feel when our loved ones are suffering. It is especially worrisome and stressful when we live far from loved ones who are experiencing difficulties because we are unable to be physically with them.

How Do Worry And Anxiety Affect Us?

Read the verses below. What physical or mental effect of worry and anxiety on us does each one describe?

Proverbs 12:25a: Overwhelming worry and anxiety is the opposite of trusting in God. It makes us feel weighed down, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Ecclesiastes 2:22–23: Worry and anxiety fill our hearts with sorrow and make our work a hardship instead of a joy. Worry and anxiety can make us sleepless which in turn can affect our physical and mental health.

Luke 21:34: Worry and anxiety can physically and mentally wear us down and can lead us to indulge in other excessive behavior (dissipation and drunkenness) which are detrimental to physical, emotional, and mental health.

When have you experienced these same effects? Encourage willing participants to share times worry and anxiety has affected them in the ways described above.

How did you deal with these effects? Participants' answers may range from God-pleasing ones such as prayer and reading Bible passages showing God's strength and His comfort to those that are not: more worry, increased fear, agitation, overeating, or drinking in excess.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–4. What very real threat did the prophet Elijah face which made him extremely worried and anxious? King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, wanted Elijah killed.

What did this extreme worry and anxiety lead Elijah to want? Elijah wanted to die.

Read 1 Kings 19:5–21. God did not leave Elijah alone. How did God help him? Twice God sent an angel to Elijah to bring him food and water for strength. God Himself spoke to Elijah to strengthen and encourage him through His Word. God gave Elisha to Elijah to be his helper.

Fixing Our Focus On God As We Travel The Expressway Of Life

Initially, where was Elijah's focus? Initially, Elijah's focus was on the danger he was in and how he could escape this danger.

What happens when we turn our focus inward to ourselves and not upward to God? When our focus is turned inward, our worries become larger than life and cause us to forget God's work in our lives and His guidance.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-8. How do these verses describe the difference between trust in ourselves or in other people and trust in God? When we trust in ourselves or other people we displease God. We are cursed, dried up, and parched. When we trust in God we are blessed and fruitful. When we look upward to God, He comforts us and leads us away from anxiety. He gives us His peace. He reminds us that through faith in Jesus who has conquered sin and death for us, that we are His and that He guards and protects us.

The following Scripture references provide welcoming exits for us when the “what ifs” on life's expressway overwhelm us. Read each reference and write down God's directions for us when worry and anxiety fill our hearts and minds.

Psalms 34:4–6: God answers our prayers and saves us from our fears and troubles.

Matthew 6:25–34: We do not need to be anxious for if God takes care of birds, how much more will He take care of us.

2 Corinthians 1:8–10: God works through troubles in our lives to draw us closer to Him. Through Christ, we are raised from death. We can trust that He will deliver us.

Philippians 4:5b–7: God is with us. He commands us: *do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to [Him]* (v. 6). *God's peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus* (v. 7), who is our refuge and strength.

1 Peter 5:7: God invites us to give our cares to Him. We can trust that He will help us because, in love, He sent Jesus to rescue us from sin and from every evil.

Read Psalm 46. Write down three phrases found in this psalm that tell of God's control over all the "what ifs" of this world. Phrases participants mention may include, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear if the earth gives way (vv.1–2a); God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns (v. 5); The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (vv. 7, 11); He makes wars cease to the end of the earth (v. 9a); "Be still, and know that I am God" (v. 10a).*

Briefly tell about a time when remembering God's almighty power helped you as you faced worry and anxiety. Encourage participants to share.

Name something specific that you can take from this study that will help you as you deal with the "what ifs" on the expressway of life. Encourage participants to share.

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, through Your Son's death and resurrection, our salvation is won. Jesus has defeated sin, death, and the devil. Through faith in You, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. As our sinful nature struggles with concerns, worries, and anxieties, guide us into Your loving arms and the grace that abounds beyond measure. May the Holy Spirit teach us to bring all the cares that burden and weigh us down to Your feet and leave them there. May we have Your peace as we know and trust that You alone have the power to rescue and save us. In the blessed and holy name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Sing: "Entrust Your Days and Burdens," LSB 754, LW 427

Encountering "What Ifs" on the Expressway of Life
Leader's Guide
Written by Kathy Johnson, Baxter, MN
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



It Would Have Been Enough

Devotion

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

You might remember a band named Three Dog Night which first began playing in the late 1960's. Their first hit was titled, "One." "One" was a sad song that addressed a post-breakup loneliness. It refers to one as being the "loneliest number." "One" is not the only song of its kind. There are many songs that celebrate togetherness and love, and just as many that speak to the heartache of a breakup or of just being single and alone.

Such songs should not come as a surprise to anyone as God created us to be social creatures. In the beginning we read that God created Adam by forming him out of the dust. God then used the naming of the animals to help Adam realize his own desire for someone like himself. *Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18).* And, upon seeing Eve for the first time Adam exclaimed, *"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23).*

With these words we have the first love story of all time! It's important to note, however, that the love Adam and Eve shared was made complete only in their relationship with God. Unfortunately, some time after their introduction they made a seriously horrible decision. They walked a path away from God, away from the love He'd given them to live in and to share. Adam and Eve's decision brought sin and death into God's perfect world. Here is where we are first introduced to the warped understanding of relationships, contentment, and loneliness.

I love to sing. I'm not very good at it, but I don't let that stop me. My philosophy is, if you can't necessarily hit the right notes, just sing louder. This encourages those around you to do one of three of things. First, they might move to another seat. Or, they might join you in singing loudly in the hope of drowning you out. Or, three, they might join you in singing with joy – even if it doesn't fit their idea of what singing is about.

God in His mercy has pulled us out of the muck and mire that is our sin and He has placed us on the solid Rock of faith that is our salvation in Jesus! In doing so, He has given us a new song to sing! It is a song of joy – it is **the** song of faith! (Psalm 40) That song, while always having Jesus at the center, is going to be sung in many different ways by many different people. And while the tune will not always resonate with those around us, we are told to sing it loud as it carries the message of forgiveness and life!

Because of sin, being single in our society sometimes has the same difficult edge to it as singing loud and off-key. As much of our culture is built around couples and families, there is often a stigma of sorts when it comes to being single and being okay with it.

This brings to mind another song: "Dayenu" (pronounced *dah-YAY-noo*). This Hebrew word means, "It would have been enough." For those unfamiliar with this song, it is sung at the

Passover Seder. In the song, there are 15 stanzas representing the 15 gifts God bestowed upon the people of Israel. The first five stanzas involve freeing the Jews from slavery, the next five describe the miracles He did for them, and the last five speak of the closeness God shared with them. Each of the stanzas is followed by the word "Dayenu" ("It would have been enough"), sung repeatedly.

How many times do we forget to pause and notice that where we are is exactly where we ought to be? This may not be by our own reckoning, but according to God's plan for our lives?

"Dayenu" is a reminder to never forget God's presence and blessing in our lives. When we become impatient because of our life circumstances as we wait on God to act on our behalf, we are missing the whole point of life. As Psalm 118:24 states, *This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* Through faith, we can sing out loud and proud the song of forgiveness, life, and joy that we have in Christ! As we live out the faith given us in Him, we can sing or say, "Dayenu."

The lyrics of "Dayenu" say that it would have been enough if God had brought us out of Egypt. They say it would have been enough if He had provided for our needs in the wilderness for 40 years. They say it would have been enough if He had brought us into the promised land of Israel. They say it would have been enough if He had called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9b). Any one of these things would have been enough, but God in His mercy desires to give us everything! He has, in fact, given us "His all" in the giving of His Son to bear all our sin and punishment so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life. God said, as He addressed those living in exile: *I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

These same words God speaks to us regardless of our life situation. His promise and His Presence will always be enough! While it is true that in life one can be a lonely number, in Christ, it doesn't have to be. In Christ, we are made whole and complete. In Christ, we are never a lonely number, but are instead a beloved sister or brother, held close and given a future and a hope in Him! "Dayenu!"

Prayer: Thank You, Lord for the gift of life You give and the song we are able to sing in Your love. Bless us to sing it long and loud as we celebrate Your presence in our lives. And bless others to hear it in such a way that they, too, may be touched by Your love and in that love, rejoice in the certain promise of life given us in Jesus our Lord. It is in His name we pray. Amen.

It Would Have Been Enough
Written by: Rev. Don White, Stuttgart, Arkansas
Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League 2019



Being Content and Single Bible Study

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles,]

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

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You promise that wherever two or three are gathered in Your name, there You will be with us. Come among us and lead us to You and to Your purpose through the study of Your Word. Thank You for redeeming us through the death of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Keep us ever mindful of those who are single within our group, as well as those who are single in the world, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may share with them the salvation found in Jesus Christ alone. Bless each of us as we seek what You would have us learn about being content in singleness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

In this Bible study, we will explore what it means to be content in Christ with our singleness. Although you may not be single, there are certainly those around you who are. Some are struggling and others are perfectly content. This study is not designed to be the final word on all types of singleness. However, if you or someone you know is some type of single, God's Word will provide you with His strength and comfort.

What Does It Mean To Be Single?

How many types of singleness can you identify? _____

Can you be more than one type of single? Explain. _____

What Does It Mean To Be Content?

How does the world define contentment? _____

For Christians, from where does contentment come? _____

Can you have more than one type of contentment? Explain. _____

Many people who are single, at least in the United States, are not content with that status. Other people, the media, and society often tell singles that in order to be fulfilled, they should strive to be in a relationship. Often, media's message is that people need to have a spouse, children, a dog, and a house to be content.

Singles may or may not have children, a dog or a house. However, what all singles lack is a spouse. They do not have an intimate, loving relationship with a lifelong partner. Often when a woman doesn't have a husband, it can lead to feelings of unworthiness and/or discontent. Many individuals who have been always single may feel unlovable, unworthy, ugly, unskilled, unable, and a host of other negative feelings.

Why Don't I Get What I Want?

God loves us and choose us to be His children. He also thinks we are beautiful. So why don't I get what I want in the form of love? Wouldn't that be best for me? Women, including myself, like to ask this question. We want to give God an assist in determining what's best for us. But, our desires often do not line up with what God has in mind for us. It is sometimes hard to put our desires aside, and instead, to seek and wait for God to reveal His plans for us.

The theme verse for this Bible study, Jeremiah 29:11, tells us that God's plans for us are only for our good. God's plans give us *a future and a hope*. In the following verses, what else is revealed concerning God's plans for us?

Psalms 10:17: _____

Psalms 37:4: _____

Matthew 6:33: _____

We Are Not Alone

If God is not giving singles the love, intimacy, and companionship of marriage, then what does one do with the feelings of loneliness? You can feel very alone, especially when you are in a group where everyone has a spouse, or if you are by yourself and wanting to go out for dinner.

What does God say in these verses about being alone?

Psalms 68:6: _____

2 Timothy 4:17: _____

What wonderful news: God is with us and we are not alone. There is so much more in God's Word that gives us this assurance. If you have a favorite verse of God's presence with you, share it here and with the members of your group. _____

True Beauty

As women, society and the media tell us all the time that we are to be beautiful. They present us with all sorts of examples of what beauty is supposed to look like. Many women, single or not, spend a lot of time comparing themselves to these worldly standards. Those who are single and who are not in a dating relationship can be especially brutal on themselves about how they stack up to the beauty standards of this world.

Read Proverbs 31:30 and 1 Peter 3:3–4. Based on these verses, how does God define beauty?

According to God, beauty is to seek Him! As we grow closer to God through His Word and the Sacraments, we are daily reminded that on the cross, Jesus paid the price we owe God for our sins. He removes our sins from us *as far as the east is from the west* (Psalm 103:12). This includes not just our past sins, or our present ones, but our future sins as well. This includes the sins of everyone. Through faith in Christ Jesus, God declares us righteous. From the time we are baptized, the Holy Spirit grows this faith in us through the Word and through the forgiveness of sins and the strength to live for God that we receive in the Lord's Supper.

God's Love For Us

As an "always" single person, I've felt that I don't really know what true love looks like. In His Word, our heavenly Father assures us that we do know what true love looks like. True love is the love God unconditionally shows us every day.

Read each Scripture passage below. How does God tell us he loves us in each one?

Psalm 36:7: _____

2 Corinthians 5:14: _____

1 Peter 2:9–10: _____

1 John 3:1: _____

1 John 3:16: _____

Whether you are married or single, how does knowing God's love for you bring contentment? _____

Read Philippians 4:12b–13. How do these verses help us find an answer for gaining contentment in our daily living? _____

God's Grace For Us

God doesn't require us to do anything to receive his love. He freely gives it to us, through faith in Christ Jesus. What comfort it is to know that, because of God's grace for us in Christ Jesus, we have God's marvelous riches of His forgiveness, His eternal love, eternal life, and a home in heaven. Read the following verses and list what each one says about God's grace.

Ephesians 1:6–7: _____

Ephesians 2:5–8a: _____

Hebrews 4:15–16: _____

Hebrews 4:15–16 tells us that Jesus understands what it means to be tempted. It tells us that He understands every emotion and feeling that we experience whether we are single or married. How is Hebrews 4:15–16 an especially powerful help for a single who is lonely or who feels unloved? _____

An Ongoing Struggle

So far, we have been reminded that God is with us. God sees us as His beautiful daughters. God loves us, and has provided for our life and our eternal salvation with His gift of His grace through faith in Jesus. We can have great joy and contentment for, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we know that this is the truth, no matter what the world may say or what the devil may try to deceive us to believe about ourselves.

But it can still be a struggle to become “comfortable” with being single. It took God’s love and grace to lead me to be content in my singleness. Many times I still need to be reminded of the peace and joy God gives, especially when I am lonely, and when I feel unloved, unworthy, and a host of other negative emotions that can come with being single. At these times, God comforts me through His Word and Sacraments. He reminds me in His Word that others struggle with these feelings too.

At times, you might ask God, “How long will I be lonely, how long will I feel unworthy and unloved?” Read Psalm 13:1–6. What does God lead David to realize after he asks Him, “How long, O Lord?” _____

How are these verses a comfort to us when we feel alone? _____

A Certain Hope

God doesn’t promise that our lives here on earth will be easy or that we will always be content. No matter what we may face here on earth, Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us that God has plans for us: plans for now and plans for our future. How do each of these verses describe our future with God?

John 14:23: _____

1 Corinthians 13:12: _____

2 Corinthians 5:1: _____

Reread Jeremiah 29:11 from the beginning of this study. How can this verse be a comfort to a person who is single? _____

As you recall God's promises of His presence, His love, and His grace for us, what are some ways that you can share these promises with those you know who are single? _____

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach us each to be content in the situations and vocations in which You have placed us. Lord God, open our eyes to those around us who are single. Lead us to befriend them and to include them. Help us to share the comfort and peace found in Jesus with them. Lead us to encourage them with the fact that all Your plans for us are good. By the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to be lights that point them to the love, grace, and contentment found only in You. In the name of Your Son, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Being Content and Single
Written by Crystal Miller, LaVista, NE
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Being Content and Single

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles,]

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

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You promise that wherever two or three are gathered in Your name, there You will be with us. Come among us and lead us to You and to Your purpose through the study of Your Word. Thank You for redeeming us through the death of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Keep us ever mindful of those who are single within our group, as well as those who are single in the world, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may share with them the salvation found in Jesus Christ alone. Bless each of us as we seek what You would have us learn about being content in singleness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

In this Bible study, we will explore what it means to be content in Christ with our singleness. Although you may not be single, there are certainly those around you who are. Some are struggling and others are perfectly content. This study is not designed to be the final word on all types of singleness. However, if you or someone you know is some sort of single, God's Word will provide you with His strength and comfort.

What Does It Mean To Be Single?

How many types of singleness can you identify? Types of singleness include widowed, divorced, never married-older, never married-younger, divorced single parent, never married single parent, in a dating relationship, not in a dating relationship,

Can you be more than one type of single? Explain. Yes. For example you can be widowed and in a dating relationship, divorced and in a dating relationship, never married-younger or older not in a dating relationship. Other combinations are also possible.

What Does It Mean To Be Content?

How does the world define contentment? By the world's standards, to be content means to be satisfied with who one is, what one does, and what one has. Those who are content may be patient, happy, at ease, blissful, positive, free, without fear, flexible, non-envious, and peaceful.

For Christians, from where does contentment come? "For Christians, contentment comes from knowing Jesus is our Savior from sin, death, and the devil. Our contentment comes not from what we have, but rather from what God has given us—new life through faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Our status has been changed from sinful to forgiven, from dead in our sins to alive in Christ! God promises to

care for us and give us all that we need. That is contentment!” (“Contentment,” *Mustard Seed: Faith-Filled Parenting*, Rev. Larry and Shari Miller, 19/32 ©2009 Lutheran Women’s Missionary League.)

Can you have more than one type of contentment? Explain. Yes, again there can be many different kinds of contentment. What qualifies as being content can vary from person to person. It is important to remember that true and lasting contentment comes not from what we own, who we are, or what we do. True and lasting contentment comes from knowing and trusting in Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Many people who are single, at least in the United States, are not content with that status. Other people, the media, and society often tell us that in order to be fulfilled, we should strive to be in a relationship. Often, media’s message is that you need to have a spouse, children, a dog and a house to be content.

Singles may or may not have children, a dog or a house. However, what all singles lack is a spouse. They do not have an intimate, loving relationship with a lifelong partner. Often when a woman doesn’t have a husband, it can lead to feelings of unworthiness and/or discontent. Many individuals who have always been single may feel unlovable, unworthy, ugly, unskilled, unable, and a host of other negative feelings.

Why Don’t I Get What I Want?

God loves us and choose us to be His children. He also thinks we are beautiful. So why don’t I get what I want in the form of love? Wouldn’t that be best for me? Women, including myself, like to ask this question. We want to give God an assist in determining what’s best for us. But, our desires often do not line up with what God has in mind for us. It is sometimes hard to put our desires aside, and instead, to seek and wait for God to reveal His plans for us.

The theme verse for this Bible study, Jeremiah 29:11, tells us that God’s plans for us are only for our good. God’s plans give us *a future and a hope*. In the following verses, what else is revealed concerning God’s plans for us?

Psalms 10:17: God hears and knows our desires. As we listen to Him through His Word, He strengthens us.

Psalms 37:4: As the Holy Spirit leads us to direct our desires to what God desires for us, we can be confident that God will give us what is best.

Matthew 6:33: God richly blesses those who seek Him and His righteousness.

We Are Not Alone

If God is not giving singles the love, intimacy, and companionship of marriage, then what does one do with the feelings of loneliness? You can feel very alone, especially when you are in a group where everyone has a spouse, or if you are by yourself and wanting to go out for dinner.

What does God say in these verses about being alone?

Psalms 68:6: God gives a home to those who are alone.

2 Timothy 4:17: God stands by those who are alone (and all people) and strengthens them.

What wonderful news: God is with us and we are not alone. There is so much more in God's Word that gives us this assurance. If you have a favorite verse of God's presence with you, share it here and with the members of your group. Encourage participants to share other Scripture verses that tell God is with us and that He is living and active in our lives. Other verses include Jeremiah 23:23–24, Philippians 4:19, and 1 Peter 5:7.

True Beauty

As women, society and the media tell us all the time that we are to be beautiful. They present us with all sorts of examples of what beauty is supposed to look like. Many women, single or not, spend a lot of time comparing themselves to these worldly standards. Those who are single and who are not in a dating relationship can be especially brutal on themselves about how they stack up to the beauty standards of this world.

Read Proverbs 31:30 and 1 Peter 3:3–4. Based on these verses, how does God define beauty? Respect and trust in God is what makes a woman beautiful (Proverbs 31:30). God defines beauty as what is inside of us. A gentle and quiet spirit is precious to God (1 Peter 3:3–4).

According to God, beauty is to seek Him! As we grow closer to God through His Word and the Sacraments, we are daily reminded that on the cross, Jesus paid the price we owe God for our sins. He removes our sins from us *as far as the east is from the west* (Psalm 103:12). This includes not just our past sins, or our present ones, but our future sins as well. This includes the sins of everyone. Through faith in Christ Jesus, God declares us righteous. From the time we are baptized, the Holy Spirit grows this faith in us through the Word and through the forgiveness of sins and the strength to live for God that we receive in the Lord's Supper.

God's Love For Us

As an "always" single person, I've felt that I don't really know what true love looks like. In His Word, our heavenly Father assures us that we do know what true love looks like. True love is the love God unconditionally shows us every day.

Read each Scripture passage below. How does God tell us he loves us in each one?

Psalms 36:7: God's love for us is constant and unchanging (*steadfast*). He is our refuge.

2 Corinthians 5:14: God's love *controls* us.

1 Peter 2:9–10: God has chosen us. He makes us His through Holy Baptism. He calls us out of darkness (sin and eternal death) to eternal life through faith in Him.

1 John 3:1: We are God's children.

1 John 3:16: Because of His great love for us, Jesus gave His life for us and rose from the dead to save us from our sins and to give us new life through faith in Him.

Whether you are married or single, how does knowing God's love for you bring contentment? No matter how unloved by others we may feel, we can be certain that God always loves us.

Read Philippians 4:12b–13. How do these verses help us find an answer for gaining contentment in our daily living? Participants will see that God provides for all our needs in every situation. God gives us the strength we need.

God's Grace For Us

God doesn't require us to do anything to receive his love. He freely gives it to us, through faith in Christ Jesus. What comfort it is to know that, because of God's grace for us in Christ Jesus, we have God's marvelous riches of His forgiveness, His eternal love, eternal life, and a home in heaven. Read the following verses and list what each one says about God's grace.

Ephesians 1:6–7: Because of God's grace for us, we have been redeemed and are forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.

Ephesians 2:5–8a: Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God rescued us from the eternal death we deserve because of our sins. *By grace you have been saved through faith* (v. 8a).

Hebrews 4:15–16: Having lived as true Man, yet without sin, Jesus understands what it means to be tempted. He understands everything that we feel. At any time, we can come to Him with confidence, knowing that He will show us mercy and grace.

Hebrews 4:15–16 tells us that Jesus understands what it means to be tempted. It tells us that He understands every emotion and feeling that we experience whether we are single or married. How is Hebrews 4:15–16 an especially powerful help for a single who is lonely or who feels unloved? Jesus understands. His love, grace, and mercy are always there for us, especially in times of loneliness.

An Ongoing Struggle

So far, we have been reminded that God is with us. God sees us as His beautiful daughters. God loves us, and has provided for our life and our eternal salvation with His gift of His grace through faith in Jesus. We can have great joy and contentment for, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we know that this is the truth, no matter what the world may say or what the devil may try to deceive us to believe about ourselves.

But it can still be a struggle to become “comfortable” with being single. It took God's love and grace to lead me to be content in my singleness. Many times I still need to be reminded of the peace and joy God gives, especially when I am lonely, and when I feel unloved, unworthy, and a host of other negative emotions that can come with being single. At these times, God comforts me through His Word and Sacraments. He reminds me in His Word that others struggle with these feelings too.

At times, you might ask God, “How long will I be lonely, how long will I feel unworthy and unloved?” Read Psalm 13:1–6. What does God lead David to realize after he asks Him, “How long, O Lord?” David realized that God had not forgotten him. David put his trust in God's steadfast love and rejoiced because God saved him.

How are these verses a comfort to us when we feel alone? God never leaves us alone in our troubles and struggles. He always loves us. We can be certain of His forgiveness and of eternal life because Jesus has rescued us from sin, death, and the devil.

A Certain Hope

God doesn't promise that our lives here on earth will be easy or that we will always be content. No matter what we may face here on earth, Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us that God has plans for us: plans for now and plans for our future. How do each of these verses describe our future with God?

John 14:23: Jesus is making a home for us in heaven and will take us to be with Him there.

1 Corinthians 13:12: Here on earth, there are many things we do not fully understand. When we reach heaven, we will know everything that God wants us to know.

2 Corinthians 5:1: No matter what happens to us here on earth, we have eternal life and an eternal home in heaven with Jesus.

Reread Jeremiah 29:11 from the beginning of this study. How can this verse be a comfort to a person who is single? God promises that He has good plans for us.

As you recall God's promises of His presence, His love, and His grace for us, what are some ways that you can share these promises with those you know who are single? Lead participants to come up with some actual ways they can share God's promises with those who are single including inviting them to lunch or dinner, make time to listen to their needs and concerns, encourage them to identify and share their talents within your church family and community, sit with them at worship services. For widows and widowers, make plans to visit them on the anniversary of the birthday of their spouse who has been called to heaven. If singles have no other family in your area, include them in your meals at holidays. Send birthday cards to those who are single. Take a true interest in the lives of those in your congregation who are single.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach us each to be content in the situations and vocations in which You have placed us. Lord God, open our eyes to those around us who are single. Lead us to befriend them and to include them. Help us to share the comfort and peace found in Jesus with them. Lead us to encourage them with the fact that all Your plans for us are good. By the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to be lights that point them to the love, grace, and contentment found only in You. In the name of Your Son, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Being Content and Single
Leader's Guide
Written by Crystal Miller, LaVista, NE
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Working Together in His Strength Devotion

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12: 4-11)

Honey bees are fascinating creatures. This insect, with a brain the size of a very small pin head, takes the nectar from the flowers of a plant and transforms it into the exquisite naturally sweet treat of honey. This honey is not only the bees' food, but is a delightful treat for us. Honey doesn't happen if there is only a single bee. It takes 20,000 bees visiting 600,000 flowers several months, working together, to make 16 ounces of honey. If one bee finds a garden of flowers, it fills its honey stomach with nectar and heads back to the hive where the rest of the bees are. This bee shares the news of the bounty, and in just a little while that one bee will be back at that garden with many of its bee friends to harvest all the nectar that is available.

In a colony of bees, not every bee is a food (nectar) collector. Each bee has its own job. Only 10–30 percent of a colony's bees go out and collect food. They collect food not only for themselves but for the others who are back in the home hive doing other jobs. Other bee workers take care of the queen, some feed the babies, some make wax to store the honey, some put caps on the honey to keep it in storage until it is needed, and some keep everything clean and tidy, so that the hive remains healthy. There must be bees to do every one of these tasks or the hive does not prosper and often dies.

The work of bees also reaps other benefits. As bees fly from plant to plant to collect food for the hive, pollen sticks to them and falls off on other plants. This causes pollination which allows those plants to bear fruit. We enjoy apples, pears, peaches, cucumbers, eggplant, corn, and soybeans because of the work of bees. Anything you eat that was grown on a plant was most likely helped along by the work of bees. By God's divine design, as each bee does its job, the hive is productive and provides much fruit for the world.

As the verses from 1 Corinthians 12 explain, the Holy Spirit gives each of us gifts to use to carry out the work He gives us to do. There is not one gift that the Holy Spirit gives that is more important than another. Every gift that the Spirit gives is important in God's kingdom and is given to be used to glorify Him and to point others to Jesus, our Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit works in us and through the encouraging words of other Christians to help us identify the gifts we have been given and to use them. Through God's Word, the faith we receive when we are baptized, and the forgiveness of sins and strength for living as Christ's redeemed people that we receive at Holy Communion, we are able to work together with others in one body. As God

works in us and through us, we bear good fruit in His name and according to His will. It is not by our own abilities or efforts, but only through Him that this happens.

On our own, we all fall short of God's expectations (Romans 3:22b–23). Through the redemptive work of Jesus and the faith we are given in Him, we are made righteous. The Holy Spirit gives us His fruit of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Galatians 5:22–23). He works in each of us *unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind* (1 Peter 3:8) so that we can work together as one body in Christ.

In a bee hive, each bee has specific work to do. Together as God's children, He gives each one of us specific work to do so that, by His grace, good fruit is produced. May we work together to carry out the work God has given us to do.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, You have redeemed us through Your death on the cross. Through Your resurrection, we have conquered sin, death, and the devil and have a new eternal life through faith in You. Grant us the strength and wisdom to work together to do the work You have given us to do, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, all Your children may come to the knowledge of You and join in the good works You have prepared for each of us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Working Together in His Strength
Written by Crystal Miller, LaVista, NE
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Working Together Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles; copies of this study; white board/markers or chalkboard/chalk or easel with poster board/markers; hymnals; if singing, musical accompaniment]

From the beginning, God did not want people to be alone or isolated. The Lord made each one of us and placed us in a family, community, and congregation. But because we are sinners, working and living with others can be challenging. In this Bible study, we will see God's framework for accepting others and how, with God's help, different personalities can work together toward a common goal.

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, by Your hands You fearfully and wonderfully made each one of us. You so graciously gave us life, and through Your Son's victory over sin and death, You give us eternal life! Open our hearts and minds today to receive Your words of peace and love as we strive to work on our relationships with others. Help us to work together in love with tender hearts and humble minds to serve You and others in Christ's name. Amen.

The Word Of The Lord

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8).

Unity Of Mind

Hearing the phrase "unity of mind" may tempt us to think, "Great! Once everyone agrees with everything I say, we will have no problems in this group!" Not only would this be an impossible task, would it even be desirable? _____

Without unique ideas and fresh perspectives, would our society (workplace, community) be a place to learn, grow, or be inspired? Instead, what would these places be? _____

Unity of mind does not mean that everyone thinks the exact same thing on matters of working and serving together. So, what does God mean for us to have unity of mind? _____

Read Romans 8:5.

Since we are born into a sinful nature, having our minds set on the things of the flesh is our default setting. We want the things that benefit ourselves individually. What are some of these things of the flesh on which we have our minds set? _____

If we continue to constantly focus inwardly on ourselves – having our minds set on serving only us individually – we will have zero ability to be able to work with others. But, good news! Our Lord has rescued us from our sinful flesh-focused selves! Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, died on the cross for us! Our selfishness is forgiven, and now the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to set our minds on the things of the Spirit! Amen!

Read Galatians 5:22–23. What are these things of the Spirit? _____

Read Philippians 2:1–4. As Christians, how can we have unity of mind even if we may not all agree on how some things should be done? _____

The written and spoken Word of the Gospel is one of God's means of grace. How does studying God's Word together with other believers help to bring us unity of mind? _____

Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the other two of God's means of grace. How does God work through these means of grace to unify us? _____

Sympathy

How would you describe what sympathy is? _____

What are ways in which we show sympathy toward others? _____

Read Romans 12:15.

While we might not always know the words to say to someone, we are usually able to have sympathy with those who are grieving. But, are we able to show sympathy towards someone who is angry, perhaps even angry at us?

There is a story about a dog that was hit by car and was able to limp to the side of the road and hide in some bushes. Along comes a woman who sees the dog in the bushes and walks up to it. But the dog would not let her anywhere near. The woman hears the growls and sees teeth bared at her, but what isn't obvious is the dog's injury. This dog is hurt. This dog is in pain. But what we see from the dog is only anger. Perhaps people are the same. Perhaps anger is just masking hurt.

Setting aside expressions of anger and trying to understand where others have been hurt can lead us to show sympathy.

The ultimate sympathy ever came from God Almighty, who saw us in our sufferings and pain, and rescued us from eternal death and separation to bring us to eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection!

Love

What do the following verses say about God's love for us?

Deuteronomy 7:9: _____

Psalms 86:15: _____

Zephaniah 3:17: _____

John 15:9-13: _____

Romans 5:8: _____

Romans 8:37-39: _____

Ephesians 2:4-5: _____

1 John 4:7-8: _____

How does the Holy Spirit work in us to respond to God's great love? _____

How would you describe "sisterly love"? _____

Sometimes "sisterly love" can have the look of extremes. If you grew up with a sister, share some of the extremes you may have experienced with her. (For example, on looks – were you dressed like twins or complete opposites? On your relationship – how quickly it could go from angry at each other to love for each other? On competition – were you on the same team or the competition?) _____

What are some examples of "sisterly love" in your LWML society (zone, district)? _____

How is God's love for us and our love for our sisters in Christ related? _____

A Tender Heart

Think about the kindest person you know. What are some things they do to show kindness to others? _____

Why do you think they are so kind? _____

Read Ephesians 4:29–32. How do these verses describe what it means to be kind? _____

Even the kindest person we know won't always be kind in every situation, and neither will we. But, through the love of God in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can adopt kindness and have a tender heart.

A Humble Mind

What is humility? _____

A tune by singer/songwriter Mac Davis goes, "O Lord, it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way" ("It's Hard to be Humble," ©1980 Songpainter Music). We may occasionally (or often) think this way about ourselves, but is it true? Instead of perfect, what is a more accurate way to describe ourselves? _____

Instead of puffing ourselves up by listing our accomplishments and expecting praise, let us put the focus on what our Lord has done for us and how we can work together to do the missions God has led us to do!

Read Ephesians 4:1–3, Philippians 2:5–11, and Colossians 3:12–13. What words or phrases in these verses have we already heard today? _____

Unity of Mind

Sympathy

Love

Tender Heart

Humble Mind

What word is at the center of the line of words and phrases shown above? _____

Now watch carefully as your Bible study leader draws a diagram using these words and phrases. Do what the leader does on your own copy of the Bible study.

Flowing out of love, we are enabled to have sympathy and tenderness. How are sympathy and a tender heart related? _____

Because our hearts are full of God's love, this love flows out to our minds. How are unity of mind and a humble mind related? _____

Because of God's love, how are we able to accept others and be able to work together? _____

Closing Prayer: We thank You Lord that Your love is at the center of our lives. Your love created us and redeemed us. Help us to love our sisters in Christ here today, so that we may have sympathetic and tender hearts toward each other. Give us unity of mind and humility so that all our words and actions honor You and build others up. Lead us and guide us to accept others and to work together. We ask this all in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Sing: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" LSB 700, TLH 351, LW 286

Working Together
Written by Rev. Jason Holden, Carbondale, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Working Together

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles; copies of this study; white board/markers or chalkboard/chalk or easel with poster board/markers; hymnals; if singing, musical accompaniment]

From the beginning, God did not want people to be alone or isolated. The Lord made each one of us and placed us in a family, community, and congregation. But because we are sinners, working and living with others can be challenging. In this Bible study, we will see God's framework for accepting others and how, with God's help, different personalities can work together toward a common goal.

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, by Your hands You fearfully and wonderfully made each one of us. You so graciously gave us life, and through Your Son's victory over sin and death, You give us eternal life! Open our hearts and minds today to receive Your words of peace and love as we strive to work on our relationships with others. Help us to work together in love with tender hearts and humble minds to serve You and others in Christ's name. Amen.

The Word Of The Lord

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8).

Unity Of Mind

Hearing the phrase "unity of mind" may tempt us to think, "Great! Once everyone agrees with everything I say, we will have no problems in this group!" Not only would this be an impossible task, would it even be desirable? Responses may vary, however a single person making each and every decision for an organization, family, or group is not ideal. Variety is the spice of life!

Without unique ideas and fresh perspectives, would our society (workplace, community) be a place to learn, grow, or be inspired? Probably not. Instead, what would these places be? Answers and experiences will vary, but most may have a theme of "undesirable."

Unity of mind does not mean that everyone thinks the exact same thing on matters of working and serving together. So, what does God mean for us to have unity of mind? Unity of mind is to together love and serve God and to have the desire to love and serve others. Unity of mind comes through a shared faith in Christ Jesus. It is not necessarily the details of what that service to others may look like.

Read Romans 8:5.

Since we are born into a sinful nature, having our minds set on the things of the flesh is our default setting. We want the things that benefit ourselves individually. What are some of these things of the flesh on which we have our minds set? Answers will vary, but should focus on those earthly things that tempt us away from our Lord.

If we continue to constantly focus inwardly on ourselves – having our minds set on serving only us individually – we will have zero ability to be able to work with others. But, good news! Our Lord has rescued us from our sinful flesh-focused selves! Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, died on the cross for us! Our selfishness is forgiven, and now the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to set our minds on the things of the Spirit! Amen!

Read Galatians 5:22–23. What are these things of the Spirit? Focus on gifts from the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Read Philippians 2:1–4. As Christians, how can we have unity of mind even if we may not all agree on how some things should be done? Our unity is in our identity as children of God. We are baptized into God's family. The Holy Spirit brings us to confess Jesus as Lord and the center of our lives. This confession is our unity of mind. How we go about serving others and working together comes from our common confession of Jesus, but our ideas on how to serve may vary.

The written and spoken Word of the Gospel is one of God's means of grace. How does studying God's Word together with other believers help to bring us unity of mind? God's Word tells us that we all are sinners (Romans 3:23). As we study the Gospel together, by the power of the Holy Spirit we see that Christ "died for all" (2 Corinthians 5:15) and gives all who trust in Him as their risen Lord and Savior forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life. Without this faith in Christ, we have no hope and no hope for unity.

Earlier we discussed how Holy Baptism unifies as children of God. How does God also work through Holy Communion to unify us? When we partake of the Lord's Supper with fellow believers, we remember together Jesus' sacrifice for our sins and are strengthened together by His grace and love so that we can serve Him.

Sympathy

How would you describe what sympathy is? Sympathy is feelings of sorrow for the hurt or loss experienced by someone else. Sympathy also involves understanding the feelings of another person.

What are ways in which we show sympathy toward others? Answers may vary, but should-focus on caring for others.

Read Romans 12:15.

While we might not always know the words to say to someone, we are usually able to have sympathy with those who are grieving. But, are we able to show sympathy towards someone who is angry, perhaps even angry at us? This question could be left as rhetorical, or something to reflect on silently. If answered, responses may vary. Listen actively to responses concerning the difficulty of showing sympathy when relationships have been broken.

There is a story about a dog that was hit by car and was able to limp to the side of the road and hide in some bushes. Along comes a woman who sees the dog in the bushes and walks up to it. But the dog would not let her anywhere near. The woman hears the growls and sees teeth bared at her, but what isn't obvious is the dog's injury. This dog is hurt. This dog is in pain. But what we see from the dog is only anger. Perhaps people are the same. Perhaps anger is just masking hurt.

Setting aside expressions of anger and trying to understand where others have been hurt can lead us to show sympathy.

The ultimate sympathy ever came from God Almighty, who saw us in our sufferings and pain, and rescued us from eternal death and separation to bring us to eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection!

Love

What do the following verses say about God's love for us?

Deuteronomy 7:9: God's love for us is eternal and does not change (steadfast).

Psalms 86:15: God shows His love for us by being merciful and gracious and slow to anger.

Zephaniah 3:17: God saves us and rejoices and exults over us.

John 15:9–13: Jesus loves us so much that He gave His life to save us. He commands us to love one another as He loves us.

Romans 5:8: God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 8:37–39: Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:4–5: Because of His great love for us even when we were dead in our sins, God has made us alive together with Christ and has saved us by His grace.

1 John 4:7–8: God is love. He commands us to love one another.

How does the Holy Spirit work in us to respond to God's great love? Of course there is a difference between how God wants us to respond and how we actually do respond. Through faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are moved by God's eternal, unconditional, and perfect love to love others.

How would you describe "sisterly love"? Answers may vary, depending on one's relationship with her sister (or absence of a sister). "Sisterly love" can generally be defined as a closeness, a special bond, a relationship that can withstand trial.

Sometimes "sisterly love" can have the look of extremes. If you grew up with a sister, share some of the extremes you may have experienced with her. (For example, on looks – were you dressed like twins or complete opposites? On your relationship – how quickly it could go from angry at each other to love for each other? On competition – were you on the same team or the competition?) Encourage all to share and react to each other's experiences. Perhaps some individuals will have "sisterly love" stories about their best friend instead of blood sister.

What are some examples of "sisterly love" in your LWML society (zone, district)? Encourage examples to be shared.

How is God's love for us and our love for our sisters in Christ related? Both types of love are close, personal, and relational. However, God's love for us is perfect. Even the best examples of our "sisterly love" pale in comparison. But because of God's love for us, our love for our sisters in Christ is possible.

A Tender Heart

Think about the kindest person you know. What are some things they do to show kindness to others? Answers will vary, but will likely focus on types of unexpected, caring actions in which the kind person puts the needs of another person before her own.

Why do you think they are so kind? Help participants make the connection that this kindness/tenderness is a result of the Holy Spirit working in the individual's heart.

Read Ephesians 4:29–32. How do these verses describe what it means to be kind? Kind people use their words and actions to build others up and to show grace and forgiveness. Their hearts are tender toward others.

Even the kindest person we know won't always be kind in every situation, and neither will we. But, through the love of God in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can adopt kindness and have a tender heart.

A Humble Mind

What is humility? Humility can be defined as “being modest,” or “not thinking too highly of oneself.”

A tune by singer/songwriter Mac Davis goes, “O Lord, it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way” (“It's Hard to be Humble,” ©1980 Songpainter Music). We may occasionally (or often) think this way about ourselves, but is it true? No. Instead of perfect, what is a more accurate way to describe ourselves? Answers may vary, ranging from a sinful wretch to not perfect but forgiven.

Instead of puffing ourselves up by listing our accomplishments and expecting praise, let us put the focus on what our Lord has done for us and how we can work together to do the missions God has led us to do!

Read Ephesians 4:1–3, Philippians 2:5–11, and Colossians 3:12–13. What words or phrases in these verses have we already heard today? Words and phrases include humility, gentleness, love, unity, servant, compassion, and kindness.

(On a whiteboard, chalkboard, or paper, write the following words.)

Unity of Mind

Sympathy

Love

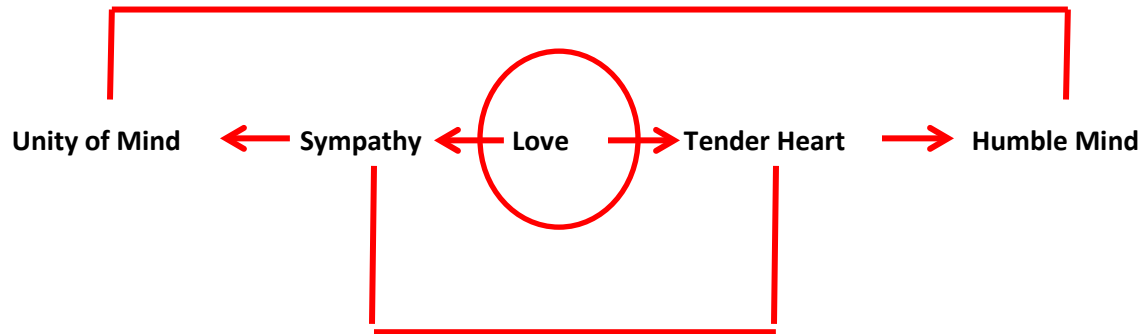
Tender Heart

Humble Mind

What word is at the center of the line of words and phrases shown above? Love

Now watch carefully as your Bible study leader draws a diagram using these words and phrases. Do what the leader does on your own copy of the Bible study.

(Circle the word “Love” on the diagram.)



Flowing out of love, we are enabled to have sympathy and tenderness. (Draw arrows from “Love” to “Sympathy” and to “Tender Heart.”) How are sympathy and a tender heart related?
Both are emotions/qualities that are focused on others through love from God.

Because our hearts are full of God’s love, this love flows out to our minds. (Draw arrows from “Sympathy” to “Unity of Mind” and from “Tender Heart” to “Humble Mind.”) How are unity of mind and a humble mind related? God’s love works in us and through us to focus our hearts together on the needs of others. He works humility in us as we love and serve others.

(Draw a line connecting “Unity of Mind” to “Humble Mind.”)

Because of God’s love, how are we able to accept others and be able to work together? God’s love moves us to love others. His love moves us to put others before ourselves. This includes putting aside the attitude of “having our way” in our families, congregations, societies, workplaces, and communities. God’s love moves us to kindness, tenderness, and to care for others. Through the faith that He gives us, God moves us to acknowledge Him as Lord and works in us to be humble. When God blesses us with His gifts of unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8), we are able to set aside our differences and accept others. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to welcome their ideas, suggestions, and help in order to spread God’s love by serving others together!

Closing Prayer: We thank You Lord that Your love is at the center of our lives. Your love created us and redeemed us. Help us to love our sisters in Christ here today, so that we may have sympathetic and tender hearts toward each other. Give us unity of mind and humility so that all our words and actions honor You and build others up. Lead us and guide us to accept others and to work together. We ask this all in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Sing: “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” LSB 700, TLH 351, LW 286

Working Together
 Leader’s Guide
Written by Rev. Jason Holden, Carbondale, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Be Still Devotion

"Be still and know that I am God." As I raced around gathering books and papers for another full day of teaching, my eyes glanced over the wall hanging of Psalm 46:10. Many thoughts rushed through my brain, already frustrated from running late. *"Be still? Really? I can't; there's so much to do!"* As a first-year teacher I was stressed to the max, and I didn't feel like I was doing a very good job. Close to tears on my drive to work, I thought, "Lord, I can't handle this! It's too much! I'm lonely and overwhelmed!"

I can't say the day ended up being great with smiling students and engaging lessons. God doesn't always work the way **we** want, for He knows better than we do what is best for us. I continued to feel overwhelmed. But at the end of the day another teacher came to my classroom to check up on me. She had been thinking about me and praying for me. Suddenly I felt a little less alone. I had some support. While she couldn't help me with lesson plans, she sympathized with the stress of being new to it all and didn't dismiss it as I felt others often did. I left buoyed by our interaction and had more hope for the future.

As I put my bags down when I later arrived home, again I saw the sign, *"Be still and know that I am God."* It was God who gave me a friend in that fellow teacher and led her to check on me that day. I realized He was still in charge and had not left me. I paused right there and thanked Him for that reminder.

I continued to the kitchen, where months earlier I had taped encouraging Bible verses on the cupboard doors. ... *fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand* (Isaiah 41:10). ... *Cast(ing) all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7). These verses had always been there in front of me, but I had stopped noticing them.

I still had lots of work to do. I still felt overwhelmed with the amount of it. But now I could take a deep breath and remember that God would guide me through it all. I thanked Him for His promises, His peace, and how He works through others to share that with me. Knowing that the Lord never leaves our side and that we can share all our frustrations with Him brings peace and comfort! No matter how busy life is, God lovingly invites us to take a moment to be still and to remember His promises. God leads us to look for the little ways He blesses us--often through the encouraging actions of others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for guiding us through each day and promising to always be with us. Thank You for Your countless blessings, and please forgive us when we lose sight of them. Help us feel Your peace in times of stress. You are in control of all things. Help us to look to You and trust Your guidance. Amen.

Be Still
Written by Rachel Wegener, Hartland, Wisconsin
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Lord, I Can't Handle This! Bible Study

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, pens or pencils.]

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, we can't handle this—whatever “this” is! We are not wise enough, strong enough, skillful enough, knowledgeable enough, or capable in any way. But You are all-wise, all-powerful, all-mighty, all-knowing. You are capable in every way! Use Your Word to encourage our hearts as we think and pray together now in Your name. Amen.

Getting Started

When people talk about stress in everyday life, they usually are describing “bad” stress, distress. Commonly, “stress” refers to problems like sick kids, overwhelming credit card debt, or arguments with co-workers.

Experts, though, remind us that not all stress is distress. Good stress, or “eustress,” gets us out of bed in the morning. It keeps us motivated and moving forward. That rapid heartbeat you experience at the surprise birthday party your friends planned for you is eustress. So is the rush that floods your being when your team wins. So is the feeling when that golden oldie starts to play and happy memories flood your heart, sending a smile across your face.

On the lines here, write down 5–10 positive stressors that have come into your life in the last month or two. How is each a blessing from our Lord? _____

Into The Word

1. As God's people, we welcome eustress and thank God for the joys it brings. But while we live here on earth, we also struggle with negative stressors, with distress. Listen while a volunteer reads 1 Peter 5:6–11. Then comment on any insights you gain, particularly about stress.

2. The opening words of this passage zero in on issues of pride and humility.

a. What's the difference between godly pride and sinful pride? How does godly pride create eustress? _____

b. How can sinful pride lead to anxiety and negative stress? What examples of each can you cite? _____

c. Philippians 2:5–8 outlines the humility of our Savior. In utter self-forgetfulness, He died for our sins—even the sins we, in sinful pride, commit. Through faith in Jesus, forgiveness is ours—

fully, completely. How does relying on His forgiveness and His love help us in times of anxiety and distress? _____

2. Many Christians have memorized 1 Peter 5:7, counting it among their favorite Bible verses.

a. What makes this invitation so comforting? _____

b. What does the little word “all” add to the invitation? _____

c. In what ways has God demonstrated His care for you in the past? How does this encourage you to trust Him in the present? _____

d. How can simple, humble trust that “God’s got this” (whatever ‘this’ is) help turn distress into eustress? Have you ever experienced that? If so, talk about it briefly. _____

3. When we’re honest with ourselves, we must admit that oftentimes we create our own distress. Our sinful pride, our neglect of prayer, and our failure to trust our Savior’s promises keeps us from experiencing the peace the Lord wants us to enjoy.

Praise God for sending Jesus to earn forgiveness for us! Praise God that Jesus died for our sins and was raised again for our justification, as Romans 4:24–25 recounts.

But there’s another source of distress, too. Read 1 Peter 5:8–9.

a. What word picture in these verses underscores the dangers Satan poses for us as God’s children? _____

b. Satan uses three main tactics: deception (lies), temptation, and persecution. Give an example of each. _____

c. Tell about a time Satan used one or more of these to create negative stress in your mind and heart. _____

d. What defensive measures does our Lord recommend in verses 8 and 9? How might these things help? (Remember, as you wield the weapons the Holy Spirit provides, He works in you and fights for you!) _____

4. The closing verses of this passage contain a beautiful promise. Read 1 Peter 5:10–11.

a. Which words or phrases stand out as particularly and personally meaningful? Explain. _____

b. How does remembering that we are “called to [God’s] eternal glory in Christ” help put all earthly stressors—both eustress and distress—into perspective? _____

c. The phrase, “to Him be the dominion,” echoes the expression, common among Christians today: “God is in control.” Think about that for a moment.

If we did not know God as our wise, kind, good heavenly Father . . .

If we could not trust in Jesus as the sacrifice for our every sin . . .

Then the thought that “God is in control” would be—not comforting—but quite frightening! Why?

But we DO know our Father’s kindness, wisdom, and love! We DO trust Jesus as our Savior. And so we pray in confidence, “To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen!”

Taking It Home

Think about a stressor that is causing distress for you. With that stressor in mind, what one verse, thought, tool, or practice will you take with you as you leave today? When and how will you use it? (Jot your thoughts on the lines below.)

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, we can’t handle this—whatever “this” is! We are not wise enough, strong enough, skillful enough, knowledgeable enough, or capable in any way. But You are all-wise, all-powerful, all-mighty, all-knowing. In the hours and days ahead, remind us of Your ever-present help and teach us to trust Your promises more and more fully. We pray in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Lord, I Can’t Handle This!
Written by Jane L. Fryar, Pacific, MO
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Lord, I Can't Handle This!

Bible Study Leader's Guide

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, we can't handle this—whatever “this” is! We are not wise enough, strong enough, skillful enough, knowledgeable enough, or capable in any way. But You are all-wise, all-powerful, all-mighty, all-knowing. You are capable in every way! Use Your Word to encourage our hearts as we think and pray together now in Your name. Amen.

Getting Started

When people talk about stress in everyday life, they usually are describing “bad” stress, distress. Commonly, “stress” refers to problems like sick kids, overwhelming credit card debt, or arguments with co-workers.

Experts, though, remind us that not all stress is distress. Good stress, or “eustress,” gets us out of bed in the morning. It keeps us motivated and moving forward. That rapid heartbeat you experience at the surprise birthday party your friends planned for you is eustress. So is the rush that floods your being when your team wins. So is the feeling when that golden oldie starts to play and happy memories flood your heart, sending a smile across your face.

On the lines here, write down 5–10 positive stressors that have come into your life in the last month or two. How is each a blessing from our Lord? Allow a few minutes for participants to work independently. When most are ready, invite volunteers to share one or two of their responses with the whole group.

Into The Word

1. As God's people, we welcome eustress and thank God for the joys it brings. But while we live here on earth, we also struggle with negative stressors, with distress. Listen while a volunteer reads 1 Peter 5:6–11. Then comment on any insights you gain, particularly about stress.

You may want to point out that dozens of psalms focus on distress; the psalmists cry out to the Lord for relief. Multiple New Testament texts address anxiety—distress, too. One of these is 1 Peter 5:6–11. It's easy to read this passage as a checklist of random commands. But in reality, the ideas are closely connected with each other and with the freedom from sin and Satan Jesus won for us at the cross.

Ask for general comments now. The discussion that follows will provide a more in-depth exploration of the passage in detail.

2. The opening words of this passage zero in on issues of pride and humility.

a. What's the difference between godly pride and sinful pride? How does godly pride create eustress? Godly pride finds pleasure in what our Lord has done in us and through us. Self-forgetful, it honors our Savior. When we recognize His work, we can praise Him for it and rejoice in it. Sinful pride focuses on self. It accents what “I can do,” what “I have done,” and what “I will do.” It seeks recognition and promotes itself.

b. How can sinful pride lead to anxiety and negative stress? What examples of each can you cite? When we assume responsibility for the results of any effort we engage, we are bound to feel stressed and distressed. In any meaningful endeavor, failure results in embarrassment, the need to blame others, and perhaps even denial that the failure has occurred. We engage in cover-up efforts.

Share examples with each other, but avoid “confessing the sins” of other people by name.

c. Philippians 2:5–8 outlines the humility of our Savior. In utter self-forgetfulness, He died for our sins—even the sins we, in sinful pride, commit. Through faith in Jesus, forgiveness is ours—fully, completely. How does relying on His forgiveness and His love help us in times of anxiety and distress? For the child of God, failure is never fatal. We can come to our Father’s throne in repentance for our sinful pride and all the other sins to which sinful pride leads—especially the failure to love God and the people around us. Because of Jesus, we know we will always receive full and free forgiveness.

Knowing we can count on our Lord for wisdom, strength, and skill in the tasks and responsibilities we take on, helps us relax, and use with confidence, the giftedness he has given us. We can also choose those tasks and responsibilities wisely in the first place, considering our weaknesses as well as our strengths and trusting God to gift others to do those things we ourselves don’t do well. If time will allow, ask for examples.

2. Many Christians have memorized 1 Peter 5:7, counting it among their favorite Bible verses.

a. What makes this invitation so comforting? Let volunteers comment.

b. What does the little word “all” add to the invitation? Again, ask for comments. If no one mentions it, suggest that no anxiety is too small and no distress too large. The entire spectrum of human difficulty is encompassed in this promise.

c. In what ways has God demonstrated His care for you in the past? How does this encourage you to trust Him in the present? Throughout life, we see our Lord doing what He has promised to do in His Word. Again and again, as difficulties and challenges bring distress, we return to that Word for reassurance. Sometimes He acts in surprising and unexpected ways, and we may not always understand His purposes here on earth. But as we look back over years and decades, we can grow more and more thankful that He is God—and we are not!

d. How can simple, humble trust that “God’s got this” (whatever ‘this’ is) help turn distress into eustress? Have you ever experienced that? If so, talk about it briefly. When we commit our challenges and distresses fully to the Lord, we can stand back and watch Him work—in our circumstances, in the people around us, and in our own hearts. It can prove exciting, and sometimes amazing and thrilling. Ask for personal examples.

3. When we’re honest with ourselves, we must admit that oftentimes we create our own distress. Our sinful pride, our neglect of prayer, and our failure to trust our Savior’s promises keeps us from experiencing the peace the Lord wants us to enjoy.

Praise God for sending Jesus to earn forgiveness for us! Praise God that Jesus died for our sins and was raised again for our justification, as Romans 4:24–25 recounts.

But there’s another source of distress, too. Read 1 Peter 5:8–9.

a. What word picture in these verses underscores the dangers Satan poses for us as God's children? These verses picture Satan as a roaring lion, prowling about on the hunt for victims.

b. Satan uses three main tactics: deception (lies), temptation, and persecution. Give an example of each. Invite volunteer comments. Jesus called Satan out as "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He tries, for example, to convince us that our Lord has not heard our prayers or, in anger at our sins, is not answering them. Satan also tempts us to solve our problems or alleviate our stress by taking actions that Scripture forbids. Finally, Satan stands behind every act of persecution Christians endure here on earth. In all these ways, and in many more besides, the devil seeks to increase our distress. Quite simply, he hates us because we belong to Jesus and our mere existence brings God glory. (See Ephesians 1:12.)

c. Tell about a time Satan used one or more of these to create negative stress in your mind and heart. Let volunteers comment. You may want to "prime the pump" by sharing an example of your own first.

d. What defensive measures does our Lord recommend in verses 8 and 9? How might these things help? (Remember, as you wield the weapons the Holy Spirit provides, He works in you and fights for you!) The text encourages us to stay watchful and to resist the devil's schemes. We are to stand firm in the truths of God's Word. It also helps to remember our Christian sisters and brothers around the world who are at this very moment undergoing persecution for the name of Jesus. We are all in this together! We are not the only ones under attack. We can count on one another's prayers and on God's gracious answers.

4. The closing verses of this passage contain a beautiful promise. Read 1 Peter 5:10–11.

a. Which words or phrases stand out as particularly and personally meaningful? Explain. Let volunteers respond.

b. How does remembering that we are "called to [God's] eternal glory in Christ" help put all earthly stressors—both eustress and distress—into perspective? As time will allow, you might have the group also read 2 Corinthians 4:17 which touches on the same issue and elaborates a bit further. In the light of the eternal glory we inherit through faith in Jesus, our best blessings and our biggest problems fade into insignificance.

c. The phrase, "to Him be the dominion," echoes the expression, common among Christians today: "God is in control." Think about that for a moment.

If we did not know God as our wise, kind, good heavenly Father . . .

If we could not trust in Jesus as the sacrifice for our every sin . . .

Then the thought that "God is in control" would be—not comforting—but quite frightening! Why?

Knowing an all-powerful, holy God is in control can (and should!) terrify impenitent sinners. Those who know the grace of God in Jesus Christ, however, find great comfort in His power and justice, as well as in His mercy.

But we DO know our Father's kindness, wisdom, and love! We DO trust Jesus as our Savior. And so we pray in confidence, "To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen!"

Taking It Home

Think about a stressor that is causing distress for you. With that stressor in mind, what one verse, thought, tool, or practice will you take with you as you leave today? When and how will you use it? (Jot your thoughts on the lines below.) This activity is designed to help participants put into immediate action the insights they have gained through the study. Encourage everyone to participate by modeling participation yourself.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, we can't handle this—whatever “this” is! We are not wise enough, strong enough, skillful enough, knowledgeable enough, or capable in any way. But You are all-wise, all-powerful, all-mighty, all-knowing. For Jesus' sake, forgive our sinful pride and our failures to trust you. In the hours and days ahead, increase our confidence in Your ever-present help and never-failing grace. We pray in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Lord, I Can't Handle This!

Leader's Guide

Written by Jane L. Fryar Pacific, MO

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Wearing the Armor of God—Really!

Sketch

[Please provide: narrator, 4 actresses, a copy of this sketch for narrator and actresses, a girdle, corset, or very wide belt (*belt of truth*), small lightweight disposable cookie sheet with the Ten Commandments printed on a piece of paper taped to it (*breastplate of righteousness*), wide ribbon, hot glue gun and glue sticks, swim fins or fuzzy slippers (*shoes of the Gospel of peace*), round metal trash can lid or big pot lid (*shield of faith*), large metal colander or strainer (*helmet of salvation*), golf club (*sword of the Spirit*), knee pads (*prayer and supplication in the Spirit*) small table with 4 chairs, 4 Bibles, two coffee cups, cell phone for Joan]

To begin: Print the Ten Commandments on a white sheet of paper and tape it to a lightweight cookie sheet. Center a wide piece of ribbon in place on one of the short sides of the cookie sheet and hot glue each end to the cookie sheet so it can be worn around the neck like a sign board. Sally will wear the girdle, the cookie sheet, the swim fins, the metal colander, and the knee pads. She will carry the garbage can lid and the golf club.

Narrator: This is the story of a somewhat confused lady who understands the message given to us in Ephesians 6:10–18a and who attempts to take this message quite literally. However, she must improvise her armor based on what she has on hand. Let's hear more about this armor now, as described in Ephesians 6: *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.*

Let's listen in now to Mary, Joan, Sally, and Liz, four Christian women, as they gather for Bible study.

Scene 1

Mary and Joan sit at a small table and enjoy some coffee while waiting for everyone to gather for Bible study. Four Bibles sit on the table in front of them. Their quiet time is interrupted when Sally enters the room – dressed in her full armor of God!

Mary: [Turns around suddenly to see Sally as she enters the room.] Joan, you are NOT going to believe this!

Joan: Mary, what is it?

Mary: It's Sally. [Whispers to Joan.] I think something strange has happened to her.

Joan: [Turns around and sees Sally.] Uh oh! I think you're right.

Sally: [Walks up to Mary and Joan at the table.] Hi ladies! How's it going? I'm really enjoying our study on the armor of God. I'm sorry it's coming to a close.

Mary: [Stutters.] Uh, uh, oh, me too! I've learned so much about the struggles we face against the devil and the world and how God has given us the means to fight back.

Sally: [Nods in agreement.] Exactly! That's why I've put on my armor of God. I'm ready for anything now! [Slowly turns around in place to show off her outfit.]

Joan: Uh, Sally, I'm not sure that God intended for us to literally wear a visible suit of armor.

Mary: [Quietly to Joan.] Look, I'll keep her occupied while you call the hospital, OK?

Joan gives Mary the thumbs up sign, gets out her cell phone, pretends to dial 911 and talk into the phone.

Mary: [Turns her attention back to Sally.] So, Sally, would you mind telling me more about your suit of armor? And where on earth did you get that belt?

Sally: Sure, I'd love to tell you about it. I'll even make a suit for you and Joan if you'd like! [Points at the girdle.] Oh, do you like my belt? I found it at the local thrift shop. I'm sure they have more if you'd like to get one. But, I digress. Of course this is my *belt of truth*. Remember how we learned that Roman soldiers' belts were important because they attached their weapons to them? Well, for us, the truth we find in God's Word is the foundation for the other tools God helps us use to fight against the devil's attacks.

Mary: [Points to Sally's cookie sheet "breastplate."] Uh, so, I guess that's your *breastplate of righteousness*, huh?

Sally: Well, of course! Remember, we learned that righteousness is to have good standing before God which comes through faith in Jesus. It's a gift of God's grace. Psalm 119:172 says, *My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right*. But, it's so hard to do that when temptation is around every corner.

Mary: Sally, don't you think that being in God's Word, asking for His forgiveness, and demonstrating true repentance for your sins as you trust in Jesus might do the same thing? And, you wouldn't have to wear that "breastplate!"

Sally: [Thinks for a moment.] Hmmm, you might just have a point there, Mary. [Takes off the "breastplate" and sets it on the table.] Whew, that's much better. With the Holy Spirit's help, I'll just be diligent in my study of God's Word and ask Him for discerning eyes so that I'm conscious of the worldly temptations surrounding me.

Joan: [Returns and speaks quietly to Mary.] The folks at the hospital didn't seem too concerned. They said to call back if she gets violent.

Mary: [Nods to Joan.] So, Sally has been telling me all about her new outfit.

Joan: Oh, really? [Looks quizzically at Sally's shoes.] I have to say your shoes are very, uh, interesting.

Sally: These aren't just any old shoes. These are *shoes of the ... gospel of peace*. A soldier wouldn't go barefoot into battle and likewise, we Christians need to have a firm footing based on the Gospel message – the glorious GOOD NEWS of salvation.

Joan: That's fine Sally, but the Holy Spirit is already working in you a firm footing in the Gospel. Every time we read or hear God's Word, the Holy Spirit works in us to help us to understand it and to live it. From the time we are baptized, the Holy Spirit continues to work in us to grow and strengthen our faith. When we celebrate Holy Communion, Christ Jesus strengthens us through the bread and wine, His body and blood. Wouldn't it be more practical to remember all this by saying a prayer every time you put your normal shoes on? Perhaps you could pray that as you go out the door, your shoes would lead you to someone who needs to hear the Gospel message.

Sally: [Sighs in relief.] Why Joan, that's brilliant! Honestly, these swim fins are really hot and they're making my feet sweat. I think I'll just switch back to my comfy shoes.

Mary: [Clears her throat.] Moving right along, Sally, I suppose you want to tell us about that shield you're carrying? Let me guess – it's the *shield of faith*, right?

Sally: [Wields the garbage can lid shield.] Of course it is! Our faith in Jesus is our firm foundation. He is constantly with us as He deflects those fiery arrows that the devil flings our way.

Mary: That's true, but, that trash can lid isn't really going to help against the devil's temptations, is it?

Sally: OK, you've got me on that one. That's a relief because this thing is HEAVY! [Sets shield on the table.] I'm feeling much better now that I know I don't really need to WEAR all this extra stuff to *put on the armor of God*. God does that for me in Holy Baptism. [Pauses and sighs.] Right now, I sure could use a cup of coffee. Let's grab a cup while we still have a few minutes before Bible study begins.

Joan: Great idea Sally! You can tell us more about your "outfit" while we enjoy our coffee.

[Joan and Mary pick up their coffee cups from the table and exit with Sally for just a moment.]

Scene 2

Sally, Joan, and Mary re-enter and sit down at the table. Liz enters a short time after and sits down with the others.

Liz: [Incredulously] Sally, is that a COLANDER on your head?! Let me guess, it's the *helmet of salvation*, isn't it?

Sally: Wow, Liz! You are very astute. Mary and Joan have been a little slow to catch on but you're right on target.

Mary: [Indignantly] I'm not slow! Just confused! Why on earth would you want to walk around with a colander on your head?!

Sally: Well, the Bible tells us that we have been freed from sin, death, and the devil's permanent grip on us through Jesus' suffering and death. Through His death on the cross and His resurrection, Jesus conquered our enemies and gives us the sure and certain hope of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in Him alone. The salvation God gives us through faith in Christ is like a helmet with which God equips us to protect our minds from yielding to the discouragement and despair our sins cause.

Liz: Sally, do you really need that colander to protect your mind from discouragement and despair? Don't you think you could just post some uplifting Bible verses about Jesus' death and resurrection around your house or on the bathroom mirror instead?

Sally: What a marvelous idea, Liz! I can put this colander back in the cabinet now. [Removes the colander from her head and sets it on the table.] Thank goodness! I wasn't sure if I'd ever be able to fix spaghetti again!

Joan: Okay, Sally, what's your explanation for how that golf club acts as *the sword of the Spirit*?

Sally: That's an easy one, my friends! My late husband, John, God rest his soul, used to play golf quite a bit. He enjoyed it but never got very good at it. All the time he'd talk about how he "sliced" the ball. I never fully understood that, but if a golf club can "slice," it should make a good sword!

Joan: [Laughs] That's a good one, Sally. But you do realize that in the context of our Bible study, if you're going to carry a weapon, you'd be better off with your Bible.

Mary: Exactly, Joan! In our Bible study, we've learned how the sword is the only offensive weapon mentioned in this passage from Ephesians. The *sword* with which God equips us is His Word. There is no one or no thing that the Word of God, coupled with His Spirit, cannot defeat.

Liz: Sally, I know you are a true prayer warrior. And, I'm thinking that, of all those visible pieces of armor you've put on today, those knee pads are the one thing you can actually use. I've heard you spend a lot of time on your knees in prayer.

Sally: Oh Liz, I'll have to tell you, I'd be thrilled to still be able to pray on my knees. I might still be able to get down on my knees, but there's no telling how I'd get back up! But on my knees or not, I pray to our heavenly Father all the time. I know that He hears and answers my prayers. I know that God "defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil" (Explanation to The First Article of The Apostles' Creed, *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH © 2017, p.16).

Mary: [Looks at her watch.] Ladies, it's just about time for our Bible study to begin. I have to say, Sally, your suit of armor definitely provided us with some good discussion. I'll never read Ephesians 6 again without thinking of you!

Joan: My friends, let's begin our time in God's Word with prayer. [The sketch ends as all four women bow their heads and fold their hands to pray.]

Wearing the Armor of God—Really!
Written by Candy Habich, Blountville, TN
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



God, You Want Me? Devotion

[Please provide: hymnals (optional)]

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

Unlike Isaiah’s eager response, my initial reaction when asked to join a Haiti mission team was “Who, me? I’m a hot-headed, socially clumsy, middle-aged, adult convert from the backwoods. What credentials do I have to offer a team of experienced mission trippers?” I thought. I began to formulate an invitation rejection: “I’m too old. I’m not qualified. I’m not gifted. What if I lip-off, offend someone, and get us kicked out of the country? It could happen!”

The mission team leader answered my objections with scriptural evidence of all the old, unqualified, ungifted, hot-headed, lippy converts God chose to accomplish His will on earth. It’s hard to argue with Holy Scripture.

The leader also pointed out that Isaiah’s first reaction to God’s presence was, *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips...”* (Isaiah 6:5). Isaiah was distraught. He confessed his impurity and his contaminated heritage. We read from the full account that God intervened, and then Isaiah’s enthusiastic response to God’s redemptive work was an obedient, “Here am I! Send me.”

Like Isaiah, we are impure and contaminated by sin. Our lips are unclean and we are guilty before a holy God. Yet, through Jesus Christ, our guilt is removed, our sin is atoned for, and our lips are consecrated for a new purpose.

Everyone who belongs to the family of God is charged with a mission to speak God’s Word, to do God’s will, and to bring God glory. In His Great Commission, the main task Jesus assigned to His followers was to go, tell, and teach (Matthew 28:19–20). Jesus calmed their anxieties, assuring them that the Holy Spirit would supply them with the needed words and opportunities. Jesus promised to accompany them always, everywhere. Our loving Savior does these same things for us.

I went with the mission team to Haiti and Jesus was true to His promise. We saw God bless the offerings of imperfect servants. We heard the Gospel translated in Haitian Creole. We witnessed the Holy Spirit draw Haitian hearts to God. We experienced prayer, love, service, and God’s faithfulness beyond what we could have imagined.

Isaiah’s eager response to God’s redemptive work was immediate: “Here am I! Send me.” It demonstrated a child-like faith that left “Woe is me!” behind and trusted God completely. Isaiah willingly followed wherever God led him.

How about you? Are you ready to leave objections behind? God asks us to faithfully tell of Jesus from the intimacy of our homes to the unfamiliarity of foreign lands, and in all spots in between. Fortified by the faith and courage the Holy Spirit gives, will you go wherever God leads?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, what great love You have lavished on us that we should be called Your children! Forgive us for any fear or reluctance to obey Your Great Commission. Give us compassion and urgency to tell those separated from You of Your mercy, forgiveness, and love. Infuse us with holy boldness to share the good news of Jesus Christ wherever You may lead us. Make us more and more, women of great faith and joyful obedience. We pray these things through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Optional Hymn: "Hark the Voice of Jesus Calling" LSB #827, TLH 496, LW 318

God, You Want Me?

Written by Mary Martin, Sterling, Kansas

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



A Life-Long Mission Trip Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study, LSB hymnal and accompaniment]

Note: You might wish to use this Bible study as part of program that includes a speaker who has recently completed a short-term mission trip.

Have you recently heard about short-term mission teams going to many parts of the world? Have the sharing and the stories concerning these trips intrigued you? Do you feel as if God is tapping you on the shoulder to participate in such an adventure? In this Bible study, let's examine what God says about mission trip opportunities.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, despite our sins, You have chosen us and You work in us to spread Your Gospel throughout the world. As we study Your Word, open our hearts and our minds to new mission opportunities including mission trips where we can joyfully share Jesus our Savior with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Our Mission

Read Psalm 145:4–13, Isaiah 43:10, and Matthew 28:18–20a. What is the mission God has given to every believer? _____

Read Romans 10:14–15. Why is God's mission for us so important? _____

How might these verses encourage you as you consider your participation in a mission trip?

Our Message

As believers in the Triune God, we are called to proclaim Him to the world. Read the following Bible passages. What facts does each one share concerning the God in Whom we believe?

Colossians 1:16: _____

Psalm 145:15–16: _____

John 3:16: _____

Ephesians 2:1–7: _____

Romans 4:25: _____

1 Corinthians 12:3: _____

These passages as well as others you know describe the Triune God and His work in our lives. Use these truths to develop a short paragraph that you could use as a way to share who God is with someone who does not know Him. _____

God's Call

Throughout the Bible, we read accounts of God inviting and even commanding His people to go and spread His saving Word. Read about one such account in Exodus 3:1–4:17.

How did God call Moses to go and serve Him? _____

What did God specifically ask Moses to do? _____

How did Moses initially respond to God's call? _____

How did God respond to Moses' objections? _____

As you ponder a mission trip opportunity, you might feel as Moses did. What gets in your way when asked to serve God? _____

When you have doubts and fears concerning serving God and sharing His Word, how might the following truths from the Bible reassure you?

Matthew 28:20b: _____

Romans 8:28: _____

Philippians 4:13: _____

Read Matthew 4:18–22. How did Jesus invite Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to serve Him? _____

What did Jesus ask these four men to do? _____

How did these four fishermen respond? _____

Read Isaiah 6:5–8. What does Isaiah’s response to God’s call as well as the response of Peter, Andrew, James, and John say to you concerning how we are to respond when given the opportunity to share God’s Word? _____

God’s call to work for Him most likely will not come to you in a burning bush or in an appearance by Jesus Himself at your workplace. Through what means does God call us to work for Him? _____

The Importance Of Prayer As We Go For God

Read Ephesians 6:18–19. What did Paul ask the Ephesians to do for him? _____

Why did Paul make this request? _____

How might you incorporate the thoughts in Paul’s prayer as you prayerfully contemplate a mission trip? _____

A Final Thought

Mission trips can take place in a far-off land or in your own community. Since God has commanded us to share Jesus with everyone, our entire lives can actually be considered a mission trip, as wherever we go we are called to share Jesus’ saving love.

Read Colossians 1:3–14. What does the Holy Spirit give us that motivates us to share Jesus (vv.4–5)? _____

Reread verses 9–11. For what things did Paul pray that God would give the Colossians that we can also pray that God would give us as we serve Him? _____

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank You for creating us, redeeming us, and for giving us faith in You. The Gospel message that Jesus died and rose to save us from our sins and to give us forgiveness of sins and eternal life is the most precious gift in all creation. Thank You for working in us so that we may share it with others. Wherever our mission trips may take us, give us strength and courage to tell others that salvation is found in You alone. Give us joy to serve You, even when it’s not easy. Wherever we go, keep us ever mindful that You are always with us so that we might accomplish all things to Your glory. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn: “Jesus, Send Us on Your Mission” by Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy (Permission granted to the LWML for its use in this Bible study.) Tune: “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” LSB 686

1. Jesus, send us on Your mission.
Make us servants true and bold.
Give us all courageous vision
That Your story may be told,
May we each, the nine fruits bearing
And the Spirit's gifts displayed.
Leave this place, Your Good News sharing
You our Rock, our Staff, and Stay
2. “Go and serve where I will send you.
Let My will and yours be one.
Go in Peace. I will befriend you.
You will never be alone.
Waste no time, now is the hour.
Let your banners be unfurled.
Go united in My power.
Bring My love to all the world.”
3. Savior, rich in grace, all-knowing,
We will follow where You lead.
In our coming and our going
You'll supply our every need.
So with alleluias raising,
And Your Name to still our fear.
On our way we now go, praising,
Sent to witness far and near!

A Life-Long Mission Trip
Written by Sandy Hardies, Garden City, Michigan
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



A Life-Long Mission Trip

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: copies of this study, LSB hymnal and accompaniment]

Note: You might wish to use this Bible study as part of program that includes a speaker who has recently completed a short-term mission trip.

Have you recently heard about short-term mission teams going to many parts of the world? Have the sharing and the stories concerning these trips intrigued you? Do you feel as if God is tapping you on the shoulder to participate in such an adventure? In this Bible study, let's examine what God says about mission trip opportunities.

Opening Prayer: Dear God, despite our sins, You have chosen us and You work in us to spread Your Gospel throughout the world. As we study Your Word, open our hearts and our minds to the new mission opportunities including mission trips where we can joyfully share Jesus our Savior with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Our Mission

Read Psalm 145:4–13, Isaiah 43:10, and Matthew 28:18–20a. What is the mission God has given to every believer? We are to share God with other generations and *make known to the children of man* [God's] *mighty deeds* (Psalm 145:12). God declares that we are His *witnesses* (Isaiah 43:10). In Matthew 28, Jesus Himself commanded His disciples to tell *all nations* of Him and His saving love. As God's people today, we are to bear witness to Him.

Read Romans 10:14–15. Why is God's mission for us so important? People need to hear of Jesus and His truths of salvation from the Bible before they can come to know Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

How might these verses encourage you as you consider your participation in a mission trip? As believers, we have the joyful privilege and duty to share with others the way of salvation found in Jesus alone.

Our Message

As believers in the Triune God, we are called to proclaim Him to the world. Read the following Bible passages. What facts does each one share concerning the God in Whom we believe?

Colossians 1:16: God our Father has created *all things*.

Psalm 145:15–16: God continually cares for all of creation.

John 3:16: God loves us so much that He sent Jesus, His only Son to save all people from their sins.

Ephesians 2:1–7: Left on our own, we are *dead* in our sins (v. 1). God, in His mercy and love, saved us from our sins and has given us eternal life through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Because of Jesus, God shows us the *immeasurable riches of his grace* (v. 7).

Romans 4:25: Jesus died for our sins and was raised so that we could be justified and made righteous in God’s eyes.

1 Corinthians 12:3: No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us faith in the Triune God, keeps us in that faith, and grows that faith within us.

These passages as well as others you know describe the Triune God and His work in our lives. Use these truths to develop a short paragraph that you could use as a way to share who God is with someone who does not know Him.

As participants formulate their paragraphs, emphasize the importance that they be God-focused. Each paragraph needs to include that God is our Creator, Redeemer, and faith-giver. Each paragraph also needs to include the reason why we need Jesus. Encourage participants to share their completed statements.

God’s Call

Throughout the Bible, we read accounts of God inviting and even commanding His people to go and spread His saving Word. Read about one such account in Exodus 3:1–4:17.

How did God call Moses to go and serve Him? God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and personally spoke to Him.

What did God specifically ask Moses to do? God asked Moses to appeal to Pharaoh so that God’s people could be brought out of slavery in Egypt.

How did Moses initially respond to God’s call? Moses feared that the Israelites would not listen to him and that he would not know what to say.

How did God respond to Moses’ objections? God told Moses what to say and even gave him his brother Aaron to speak for him.

As you ponder a mission trip opportunity, you might feel as Moses did. What gets in your way when asked to serve God? The devil can stir up fear and doubt in us. Instead of relying on God and His power to help us, we instead focus inward on our own inadequacies. We may also think we don’t have the time to serve. We may also put other obligations before God’s call.

When you have doubts and fears concerning serving God and sharing His Word, how might the following truths from the Bible reassure you?

Matthew 28:20b: Jesus Himself promises to be always be with us.

Romans 8:28: In all things, God works for good, even if we make unwise decisions or fumble opportunities.

Philippians 4:13: God gives us the strength to do all that He asks of us.

Read Matthew 4:18–22. How did Jesus invite Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John to serve Him? Jesus saw them and personally spoke to them.

What did Jesus ask these four men to do? Jesus said to them, *Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men* (v. 19).

How did these four fishermen respond? *Immediately* (vv. 20, 22) they left their fishing nets and boat and followed Jesus.

Read Isaiah 6:5–8. What does Isaiah’s response to God’s call as well as the response of Peter, Andrew, James, and John say to you concerning how we are to respond when given the opportunity to share God’s Word? By the power of the Holy Spirit, we joyfully say, *Here am I! Send me.* (Isaiah 6:8). Through faith, the Holy Spirit gives us the desire to serve God because of all that He has done and continues to do for us as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

God’s call to work for Him most likely will not come to you in a burning bush or in an appearance by Jesus Himself at your workplace. Through what means does God call us to work for Him? God calls us to work for Him through His Word accompanied by the encouragement of other Christians.

The Importance Of Prayer As We Go For God

Read Ephesians 6:18–19. What did Paul ask the Ephesians to do for him? Paul asked them to pray for him as well as for the other believers who were sharing the Gospel.

Why did Paul make this request? Paul recognized that he needed boldness and courage from the Holy Spirit so that he could powerfully continue to preach the Gospel message.

How might you incorporate the thoughts in Paul’s prayer as you prayerfully contemplate a mission trip? Like Paul, we also need the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can boldly proclaim Christ.

A Final Thought

Mission trips can take place in a far-off land or in your own community. Since God has commanded us to share Jesus with everyone, our entire lives can actually be considered a mission trip as wherever we go we are called to share Jesus’ saving love.

Read Colossians 1:3–14. What does the Holy Spirit give us that motivates us to share Jesus (vv.4–5)? The Holy Spirit gives us faith, love for others, the sure and certain hope of eternal life because of Jesus’ death and resurrection for us, and the wisdom for salvation that comes from the Gospel.

Reread verses 9–11. For what things did Paul pray that God would give the Colossians that we can also pray that God would give us as we serve Him? By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can pray that we would be *filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding* (v. 9). We can pray that we *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord* (v. 10) and that we might *bear fruit in every good work* for God as well as *increase(ing) in the knowledge of God* (v. 10). We can pray for God’s *power, endurance and patience with joy* as we serve Him (v. 11). In our prayers we can also thank God who has made us His heirs and who has taken us out of the darkness and death of sin and *transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son* who has redeemed us and forgiven us (vv. 12–14).

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank You for creating us, redeeming us, and for giving us faith in You. The Gospel message that Jesus died and rose to save us from

our sins and to give us forgiveness of sins and eternal life is the most precious gift in all creation. Thank You for working in us so that we may share it with others. Wherever our mission trips may take us, give us strength and courage to tell others that salvation is found in You alone. Give us joy to serve You, even when it's not easy. Wherever we go, keep us ever mindful that You are always with us so that we might accomplish all things to Your glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn: "Jesus, Send Us on Your Mission" by Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy (Permission granted to the LWML for its use in this Bible study.) Tune: "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," LSB 686

1. Jesus, send us on Your mission.
Make us servants true and bold.
Give us all courageous vision
That Your story may be told,
May we each, the nine fruits bearing
And the Spirit's gifts displayed.
Leave this place, Your Good News sharing
You our Rock, our Staff, and Stay
2. "Go and serve where I will send you.
Let My will and yours be one.
Go in Peace. I will befriend you.
You will never be alone.
Waste no time, now is the hour.
Let your banners be unfurled.
Go united in My power.
Bring My love to all the world."
3. Savior, rich in grace, all-knowing,
We will follow where You lead.
In our coming and our going
You'll supply our every need.
So with alleluias raising,
And Your Name to still our fear.
On our way we now go, praising,
Sent to witness far and near!

A Life-Long Mission Trip
Leader's Guide
Written by Sandy Hardies, Garden City, Michigan
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



TIME OUT Devotion

[To prepare: Make a copy of the “T-I-M-E” clock face found at the end of this devotion. Hang on a wall to display. Make copies of the “TREASURE,” “INSPIRE,” “MEDITATE,” and “EVANGELIZE” word cards found at the end of this devotion. Cut out each card. Have adhesive tape ready to attach words to the clock at the proper time in the devotion.]

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4).

The team’s coach signals, “Time Out,” and the referee’s whistle blows. (Point to the letters T-I-M-E on the clock face.) During a “time out” in an athletic competition, the coach gives her team further instructions to help the players refocus on the game at hand.

We are members of God’s team. In our Baptism we were drafted by God Himself as members of His team in the game of life-Christian mode. That faith contract that God established when we were baptized was reaffirmed in the rite of Confirmation. As His loved and redeemed children in Christ, God didn’t call us to be “bench warmers,” but instead, “first-stringers.”

Even though we have been redeemed from sin and death through the death and resurrection of our Savior, we still sin. As even the highest-paid professional players sometimes fumble the ball or miss the basket, in the game of life-Christian mode, we too sometimes mess up. Like those erring athletes we need a “time-out.”

(Point again at the “T-I-M-E” clock.) The season of Advent can be considered a “time out” for Christians. During this time (as well as during other times of the church year), the Holy Spirit works in us to reset our clocks and to strengthen our faith as we live for Him.

(Show the “TREASURE” word card.) For Christians, Advent is a time to TREASURE. We treasure all that God has done and continues to do for us. Once we were dead and lost in sin. In His love and mercy, God promised and sent a Savior to buy us back for His team. Jesus suffered the punishment for our sins on the cross, rose on Easter, and has ascended to heaven to create an eternal home for us. That kind of love is beyond human understanding. Like Mary, who “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19), as we treasure what Jesus has done for us, we want to serve Him gratefully with all our hearts. (Tape the “TREASURE” word card on top of the letter “T” on the clock.)

(Show the “INSPIRED” word card.) Advent is a time to be INSPIRED. God the Holy Spirit, our coach, works in our hearts through the Good News of our Savior’s birth, death, resurrection, and ascension to inspire us to play our “A-game” for Him. His love for us inspires us to serve Him and those around us. God opens our eyes to the needs of people in our congregations and communities. God blesses each and every one of us with talents and abilities to use as we share His blessings with those around us. He enables us to answer His call for greater service and to spread His love and mercy on a global basis. (Tape the “INSPIRED” word card on top of the letter “I” on the clock.)

(Show the “MEDITATE” word card.) Advent is also a “time out” to MEDITATE on what’s truly important. Amid the shopping, baking, parties, and other activities of the Advent/Christmas season, it is easy to forget what we really need. On these busy days, as He does every day, God invites us to talk with Him in prayer. God works through His Word in Advent devotions and worship services to help us focus on Christ’s coming as a baby, His coming to us today in His Word, and His final coming to take us to that winning trophy of heaven. In Holy Communion, God gives us the strength we need to live our lives as His redeemed people. (Tape the “MEDITATE” word card on top of the letter “M” on the clock.)

(Show the “EVANGELIZE” word card.) Finally, Advent is also a time to EVANGELIZE: to share the wonderful message of Christmas and what it means for the world. When the shepherds came and saw the Baby in a manger, they *made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child* (Luke 2:17). Sometimes our evangelizing can be “soft-sell” sharing as we select the Christmas card with a nativity scene instead of a snowman or use Christ-centered Christmas decorations around our home. When our families gather for the holidays, we can include Christmas Eve and/or Christmas Day worship services as part of our celebration. We evangelize as the Holy Spirit encourages us to share the meaning of Christmas with co-workers and neighbors. (Tape the “EVANGELIZE” word card on top of the letter “E” on the clock.)

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4). Through His Word and Sacrament, God strengthens us so that we might live our lives as His people. As we trust in His game plan, carried out for us by Jesus our Savior, we have victory over sin, death, and the devil. We have the gifts of eternal life and forgiveness of sins. We are confident that through faith, we will reach the goal of living with our Triune God in heaven forever.

Prayer: Lord, we confess that we are so easily preoccupied with the things of this world that we forget the real meaning and joy of this Advent and Christmas season. Help us to treasure Your coming as a baby and the sacrifice You made to redeem us. As we meditate on that great gift, may the Holy Spirit inspire us to share the Gospel with others and to serve You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Time Out

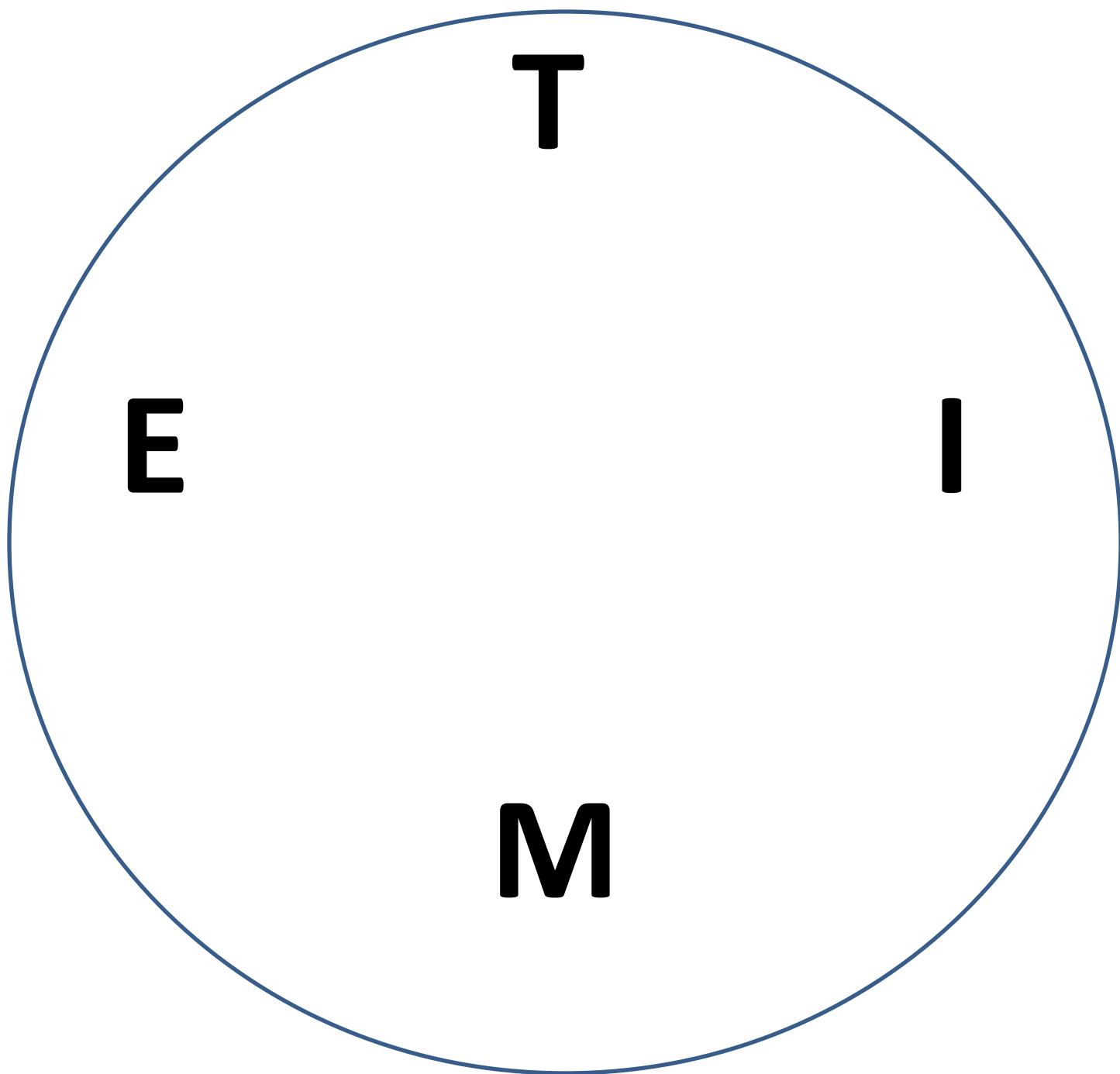
Written by Suzanne Winterhof, Aurelia, Iowa
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019

TREASURE

INSPIRE

MEDITATE

EVANGELIZE





The Right Time Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles, hymnals, a copy of this study for each participant, and an accompanist if you wish to sing the hymn verses included in this study.]

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. Galatians 4:4–5

Opening Hymn: Read or sing together, “O Sing of Christ,” verses 1 and 2 (LSB 362).

Opening Prayer: Lord of time and God of the Church, we come to You to ask You to guide us in understanding the moments of our lives. Bless us with wisdom to trust Your providence, by caring for us in all that is necessary for this life, and all that is needed for the life to come. Teach us to trust You for Your timing in our lives, including how and when You bring Your gifts of care to us. Guide us in faith and faithfulness as Your children. Remind us that at the right time, You sent Jesus Christ into the world, so that You could redeem the lost and protect the elect, through Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen

Chronology is “moving time.” We speak of how time flies, because we cannot change its flow. Seconds become minutes; hours become days; weeks and months become years; centuries become millennia. The passage of time is essential to our lives.

Thinking About Time

Why does time fly when we are having fun, and linger while we suffer? _____

Read Psalm 90:1–12. In these verses, what does God tell us about Himself in relation to time?

What control of time do we have in our lives? _____

How can our understanding of time help our understanding of God and His plan? _____

Compare Jude 24–25 with the verses you just read from Psalm 90. How is God timeless?

Speak or sing together, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” verse 5 (LSB 733, TLH 123, LW 180). How do these lyrics reflect the Biblical truths you previously read concerning time?

Moving Time And Moments Of Importance

Although our lives are marked by the passage of time, most of what we understand has more to do with the moments we deem important in our lives. We see events within time as essential to how our lives are fitted together, and we even note the plan of God in the ways that we grow and in the things that we experience. Physicists speak of time as the fourth dimension, because time and place are often determined by when, as well as by where. This gives us a picture of a proper time, or the “right time.” Let me illustrate this with a story:

As a boy, I went to the frozen lakes of Minnesota with my father, who liked to supplement our diet with fish. I remember being in a dark house, (one of the huts on a lake in winter), with a hole he chipped through the ice, a few decoys hung down into the water, and an eleven point spear that he used to throw at bigger fish when they came into view. The rope from the spear was attached to his leg so that it would not be lost, and he could retrieve the fish. The darkness of the fish house allowed me to see the fish come into view, while sunlight filtered through the ice around us and revealed little fish as well as big ones, swimming beneath us. When the northern pike came into view, I was hushed by his finger to his lips, and as he motioned to me, I stepped back for him. I watched as my dad threw the spear, and retrieved our supper. There was a sense of timing that was needed for his throw to be successful, as well as accuracy, so that both were essential for his purpose to be fulfilled.

Let's explore what the Bible says concerning God's sense of timing and His accuracy in His purpose.

How would you describe the difference between moving time (chronology) and the right time (moment of importance)? _____

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–17. Describe those things in these verses that show a sense of “moving time.” _____

Describe those things that show a sense of “moments of importance.” _____

Compare the verses you just read in Ecclesiastes with Psalm 90:1–12 that you read earlier in this study. How can you use the flow of time to bring glory to God? _____

Read or sing together, “Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You,” verses 1–3 (LSB 668, TLH 444, LW 303). Why is our time on earth precious? _____

God's Plan And His Timing

How does God plan time for our benefit? _____

Read Galatians 4:4-5. Do we know for certain the exact date and time when Jesus was born?

Why does Galatians 4:4 call the time when Jesus came to earth the “fullness of time” or “the right time”? _____

What do each of these verses say about God’s timing concerning Jesus’ earthly ministry, as well as His promised mission to save all people from their sins?

Mark 1:15: _____

Romans 3:21–26: _____

Romans 5:6: _____

Ephesians 1:7–10: _____

1 Timothy 6:11–19: _____

As we read these Scripture passages, we note how God has control of time to bring about what He desires to accomplish. Time becomes God’s servant in the salvation of the world. God’s timing and accuracy in bringing salvation in Jesus is perfect. At the time, the world had a language which was precise for writing God’s Word, a system of roads that allowed easy travel to foreign nations, and population which would grow in order to reach the most possible people over the next two millennia. Even now, God knows how to work His grace in our world. God’s timing in our life is eternal. It will continue until Jesus’ second coming as well as when we reach our heavenly home in timely fashion.

Read or sing together, “There Is A Time For Everything,” verse 4 (LSB 762). According to this hymn verse, how is God continuing to use time in our lives? _____

Why do we say, “Hindsight is better than foresight”? _____

Read Romans 8:18–39. Knowing that God perfectly sees the right time, why is it often hard for us to accept His timing? _____

Growing In Time

Read the following verses and identify the times of growing in our lives that each one describes.

Luke 8:4–15: _____

Ephesians 5:16: _____

Which of the growing seasons described in these verses have you experienced in your life?

Read Hebrews 4:14–16. Where in your own life has God used testing at the right time? _____

God's Timing For Our Future

We will not have a perfect world until Jesus comes again. Do we long for Him to judge sinners, or do we desire hope for His chosen saints? Can we have perfect joy while sin exists in and around us? These questions help us reflect upon God's purposes to redeem the world. While we long for redemption, we also understand that the redemption which God plans is for more than just us only. We long for an end to sin, but that also means an end to sinners. Hope for His saints is for Him to bring relief from sin and its effects. The perfect joy His Spirit brings is tainted in our lives by our own sinful flesh, and will not be complete until Jesus comes again in glory.

Read Mark 13: 24–37. What will Jesus' return as King of glory be like? _____

Read Matthew 25:1–12, 31–46, and 2 Peter 3:1–9. How can we be prepared for Jesus' second coming?

Why can we say our Lord's return will be at "the right time?" _____

Closing Prayer: Read or sing, "The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns," verses 1–5 (LSB 348, LW 26).

The Right Time
Written by: Rev. Robert W. Grimm, Alma, Kansas
Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



The Right Time

Bible Study

Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles, hymnals, a copy of this study for each participant, and an accompanist if you wish to sing the hymn verses included in this study.]

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. Galatians 4:4–5

Opening Hymn: Read or sing together, “O Sing of Christ,” verses 1 and 2 (LSB 362).

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Thinking About Time

Why does time fly when we are having fun, and linger while we suffer? Humans understand time by its motion, and waiting is not an easy task for most people. When we want something to happen that is anticipated, we must wait. When we want something to end that we do not enjoy, we must wait. It is important for us to see the “right time” as the moment God has for us in the present, even while we look for something which lies ahead of us. So time flies when we are having fun because we want to savor the moments of joy, prosperity, and peace. Time lingers when we are suffering because we want pain, sorrow, and misery to end quickly.

Read Psalm 90:1–12. In these verses, what does God tell us about Himself in relation to time? God is timeless. We express this attribute of God by calling Him eternal. He is a supernatural being without a beginning or an end. God is unaffected by time because He is immutable, but He works within time, because time is His creation in the world. As humans, our time on earth is limited (v. 10). In verse 12, we are taught to use time to learn of God and to gain wisdom from Him.

What control of time do we have in our lives? In one sense, we have no control over time. It will continue as God has planned, until the Last Day. Seconds become minutes, minutes become hours, and hours become days without our help or encouragement. In another sense, we have control over what we do in the time that is allotted to us. There are 86,400 seconds in each day. That number is fixed. But we may do many things within that time period, so we have an ability to use time wisely, or not.

How can our understanding of time help our understanding of God and His plan? When we grasp the concept that God uses time to bring His grace into the world, we understand His nature and will for us to be content in every time of our life. We trust His goodness. We can always expect His blessing, that is, His presence, His mercy, and His love to be seen in each moment, for He redeems.

Compare Jude 24–25 with the verses you just read from Psalm 90. How is God timeless? Before all time and now and forever, God has purposed to bring life to His beloved children. He desires for us to be perfect before Him and to know joy in His presence. This is possible through faith in Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. God’s plan for our redemption has been, is now, and always will be part of His nature.

Speak or sing together, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” verses 1–5 (LSB 733, TLH 123, LW 180). How do these lyrics reflect the Biblical truths you previously read concerning time? God is eternal (v.1). He has always existed, even before anything was created (v. 3). God’s sense of time is completely different from ours (v. 4). Time is constantly moving. Eventually we will leave this earth, although as those who trust in the Triune God, our life will continue in heaven (v. 5).

Moving Time And Moments Of Importance

Although our lives are marked by the passage of time, most of what we understand has more to do with the moments we deem important in our lives. We see events within time as essential to how our lives are fitted together, and we even note the plan of God in the ways that we grow and in the things that we experience. Physicists speak of time as the fourth dimension, because time and place are often determined by when, as well as by where. This gives us a picture of a proper time, or the “right time.” Let me illustrate this with a story:

As a boy, I went to the frozen lakes of Minnesota with my father, who liked to supplement our diet with fish. I remember being in a dark house, (one of the huts on a lake in winter), with a hole he chipped through the ice, a few decoys hung down into the water, and an eleven point spear that he used to throw at bigger fish when they came into view. The rope from the spear was attached to his leg so that it would not be lost, and he could retrieve the fish. The darkness of the fish house allowed me to see the fish come into view, while sunlight filtered through the ice around us and revealed little fish as well as big ones, swimming beneath us. When the northern pike came into view, I was hushed by his finger to his lips, and as he motioned to me, I stepped back for him. I watched as my dad threw the spear, and retrieved our supper. There was a sense of timing that was needed for his throw to be successful, as well as accuracy, so that both were essential for his purpose to be fulfilled.

Let’s explore what the Bible says concerning God’s sense of timing and His accuracy in His purpose.

How would you describe the difference between moving time (chronology) and the right time (moment of importance)? Answers may vary according to how people understand the concept of time. Moving time is the unstoppable nature of the natural world as God has created it. The right time implies how certain elements have coincided to allow an event to be noteworthy. For example, it is normal for the moon to wax and wane on a monthly cycle. But it is easier to view the stars when the moon is not visible during the period of a new moon. The absence of the moon’s light makes it the right time to see other stars. This opportune time is one that passes as time moves forward.

There are three different Greek words which are used to describe time. One is *chronos*, the word from which we get the concept of chronology. It usually refers to spending time in an activity. Another word,

kairos refers to opportunity, or the right time for an event to have impact and become momentous, a “moment of importance.” A third word, aion refers to a long amount of completed time, as in an age, epoch or eon, and sometimes refers to “eternity.”

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–17. Describe those things in these verses that show a sense of “moving time.” There is a time for every matter under heaven (v. 1). As time moves on, there will be opportune times for events. Yet, time moving forward is a truth we cannot change.

Describe those things that show a sense of “moments of importance.” All the other events in Ecclesiastes 3:2–8 are considered moments of importance. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, all three Greek words are used in this section of Scripture. Chronos in verse 1, Kairos in vv. 2–8, 11, and 17 and Aion in vv. 11 and 14.

Compare the verses you just read in Ecclesiastes with Psalm 90:1–12 that you read earlier in this study. How can you use the flow of time to bring glory to God? Because time is a gift of God, we are to use this gift to His honor and glory. Instead of succumbing to the temptation to use this gift for our own selfish purposes or in wasteful and wicked ways, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we ask for guidance to use the time God gives us in ways pleasing to Him in service to Him and to others. By the power of the Holy Spirit in response to all that God has done and continues to do for us, we desire to offer Him praise and glory as we worship Him. We especially pray that God would lead us to see and to act upon the opportunities He gives us to share His Gospel message with the world.

Read or sing together, “Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You,” verses 1–3 (LSB 668. TLH 444, LW 303). Why is our time on earth precious? Satan is lurking, trying to destroy us (v. 1). Our time on earth is “fleeting” (v. 3). Jesus promises to be with us and to give us the strength to endure until He takes us to heaven (v. 2).

God’s Plan And His Timing

How does God plan time for our benefit? God has worked to save and deliver all who trust in Christ. Therefore, because God knows and understands the passage of time, and the importance of time, He can use this wisdom to bring blessings to us. He will work within personal lives through His Word and Spirit so that the time of salvation may become part of our existence in time, and remain ours through all eternity. This is the revealed knowledge of God in our lives.

God was and is able to work within time to do great miracles: Recall these examples of God’s miraculous might: The sun standing still as Israel fought enemies; the shadow that moved backward up the stairs in the time of Hezekiah; Jonah inside the great fish for three days and his release on dry land; Jesus’ raising Lazarus after four days in the grave; Jesus’s own resurrection from the dead on the third day. God continues to have and use this ability to bring about a “day of salvation” when He gives us faith and rescues us from the clutches of the devil and takes us into His arms. This is the day when we are baptized. God also reminds us of His will and ways by the Holy Spirit through our conscience when events occur in our lives that help us to realize His constant presence with us. This is the natural knowledge of God in our lives.

Read Galatians 4:4–5. Do we know for certain the exact date and time when Jesus was born? The actual birth date of Jesus is not known from history. Scripture tells us he was born before King Herod died in 4 B.C. (or perhaps 2 B.C., depending upon an understanding from Josephus, a Jewish historian). The date of Christmas comes to us as a Christian holiday because another celebration in the Roman world allowed Christians a free day to gather and celebrate the birth of the Savior instead of the growing of the sun (Saturnalia). Most likely, Jesus was born in lambing season (early spring) because the shepherds were

out by night, watching their flocks. It was, and still is, important for shepherds to be available to help ewes as they are lambing. The natural cycle is for sheep to become pregnant in fall and to give birth to lambs in the spring, although the cycle may be changed through aggressive herd management.

Why does Galatians 4:4 call the time when Jesus came to earth the “fullness of time” or “the right time”? The chronology of Jesus’ entrance in to our world is the most important moment in human history. God personally entered our chronological time in Jesus Christ. He took on time, and even death, in order to redeem all those bound by sin and the ravishing effects of time in our world. Consider all that God had caused to coincide with the entrance of His Son Jesus Christ: prophecies made and fulfilled, an unusual star to lead the Wise Men, a darkening of the sun as Jesus died on the cross, an earthquake at Jesus’ resurrection.

What do each of these verses say about God’s timing concerning Jesus’ earthly ministry, as well as His promised mission to save all people from their sins?

Mark 1:15: As Jesus began His earthly ministry, He proclaimed, *the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.*

Romans 3:21–26: Jesus’ actions on our behalf were *to show his righteousness at the present time* (v. 26). “God’s righteousness in Christ is still effective” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, study note on Romans 3:26, page 1915.

Romans 5:6: *At the right time*, Christ died for us, the *ungodly*. This occurred according to God’s perfect timing.

Ephesians 1:7–10: Jesus redeemed us according to the timing God His Father planned. The *fullness of time* in verse 10 refers to “The messianic age [which] began with Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, ©2009, study note on Ephesians 1:10, page 2017.

1 Timothy 6:11–19: We can be assured that God will choose “the right time” for Jesus’ return on the Last Day.

As we read these Scripture passages, we note how God has control of time to bring about what He desires to accomplish. Time becomes God’s servant in the salvation of the world. God’s timing and accuracy in bringing salvation in Jesus is perfect. At the time, the world had a language which was precise for writing God’s Word, a system of roads that allowed easy travel to foreign nations, and population which would grow in order to reach the most possible people over the next two millennia. Even now, God knows how to work His grace in our world. God’s timing in our life is eternal. It will continue until Jesus’ second coming as well as when we reach our heavenly home in timeless fashion.

Read or sing together, “There Is a Time for Everything,” verse 4 (LSB 762). According to this hymn verse, how is God continuing to use time in our lives? By the power of the Holy Spirit, God has work for us to complete and praises for us to sing to Him.

Why do we say “Hindsight is better than foresight”? This saying reminds us that we cannot know the future. Therefore, it is easier for us to learn from the past than to guess how things will turn out in the time ahead. But God is not limited merely to a knowledge of the past, for He also has knowledge of the future. Therefore, we trust His word as it speaks about our past, present, and future.

Read Romans 8:18–39. Knowing that God perfectly sees the right time, why is it often hard for us to accept His timing? Because of sin, we know hardship and experience suffering. Our sinful nature and Satan’s falsehoods concerning God cause us to doubt God. The pain and suffering we experience distract us from God’s promises. God promises, however, to allow nothing to separate us from Him and from His love for us in Christ Jesus (v. 39).

Growing In Time

Read the following verses and identify the times of growing in our lives that each one describes.

Luke 8:4–15: Jesus uses the parable of the sower to explain how God’s Word grows or doesn’t grow in people’s hearts. As we all experience, our sinful nature, the troubles and hardships which abound in the world, and the devil all resist the growth of God’s Word in our hearts. “By God’s grace, however, our faith not only withstands trial and temptation but even grows stronger” (The Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, ©2009, study note on Luke 8:9–15, p. 1725).

Ephesians 5:16: God commands us to make the “best use of the time, because the days are evil.” Our time here on earth is limited and we are not to waste it on foolish pursuits and endeavors that take us away from what God’s will is for us and the growth in His Word that the Holy Spirit works in us.

Which of the growing seasons described in these verses have you experienced in your life? Encourage participants to share with honesty times of growth and some of the more stagnant times in their lives and how, through each, God has continued to grow faith in them.

Read Hebrews 4:14–16. Where in your own life has God used testing at the right time? Trials and temptations provide growing seasons in our lives. What we often refer to as a crisis is an opportunity for God to reveal His time of grace. In difficult times, while we are tempted to doubt God’s faithfulness to us through these tests of faith, God strengthens us and draws us closer to Him. God always encourages us toward faith while the devil, the world, and our sinful nature always lead us to doubt or despair. God uses testing to make us courageous for Him by showing us Christ, who was tempted, yet overcame for us (Matthew 4:1–11; Hebrews 4:15). This is where our testing leads us—to trust in Christ.

God’s Timing For Our Future

We will not have a perfect world until Jesus comes again. Do we long for Him to judge sinners, or do we desire hope for His chosen saints? Can we have perfect joy while sin exists in and around us? These questions help us reflect upon God’s purposes to redeem the world. While we long for redemption, we also understand that the redemption which God plans is for more than just us only. We long for an end to sin, but that also means an end to sinners. Hope for His saints is for Him to bring relief from sin and its effects. The perfect joy His Spirit brings is tainted in our lives by our own sinful flesh, and will not be complete until Jesus comes again in glory.

Read Mark 13: 24–37. What will Jesus return as King of glory be like? Jesus’ return will be magnificent for believers, and terrifying for unbelievers. The Bible speaks of the end of the world as we know it. Heaven and earth will pass away (v.31) Angels will gather believers at this time of Christ’s Second Coming to bring them into the Father’s presence. Unbelievers have no promise of rescue, and will suffer consequences for their faithlessness. We are to remain alert and to be ready for Jesus’ return (vv.33–37).

Read Matthew 25:1–12; 31–46 and 2 Peter 3:1–9. How can we be prepared for Jesus’ second coming? The Bible tells us that God Himself seeks to bring us grace. His Word proclaims His love in His

desires and in His actions to rescue sinners. We are prepared for Jesus' return through the faith that God provides us through His Word and Sacraments. God uses these means of grace to build our faith. We respond to God's means of grace in prayer, in worship, in service, and in love. True preparation is to walk by faith. 2 Peter 3:8–9 reassures all believers: *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* In our time of waiting, God works in us to share the Gospel so that all may hear the saving message of Jesus.

Why can we say that our Lord's return will be at "the right time?" No one has the knowledge of God's timing for the Last Day, except God Himself. God's Word tells us the end will come. As we see God's perfect timing in other ways in our life, by faith we trust that Jesus' return will be at "the right" and perfect time as well.

Closing Prayer: Read or sing, "The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns," verses 1–5 (LSB 348, LW 26).

The Right Time
Leader's Guide

Written by: Rev. Robert W. Grimm, Alma, Kansas

Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Afraid Of What?

Devotion

The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:5b–7).

In today's world it is very hard to find someone who is not afraid of anything. Most everyone is afraid of something, be it snakes, storms, heights, or loss. What are you afraid of? Take a moment to reflect silently on something that you fear. If you feel comfortable, share your fear with the rest of your group.

Perhaps some fears that you currently face have to do with flying, violence, finances, infertility, or the fear of losing a spouse or loved one. When we look back on our childhood fears, we can usually remember being scared of things like the dark, the monster under our beds, or perhaps what would happen if we got caught doing something bad. This and the actions it caused were first faced by Adam and Eve.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:8–10).

Adam was afraid because he knew that he had sinned. He knew he was in the wrong and he feared God's response as a result of his disobedience. Adam knew what he deserved for his sin--death. In Adam and Eve's sin, all people also fell into sin (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH, ©2017, Q.22, p. 56). *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me* (Psalm 51:5). Because of the sin we inherit and for our own sins that we commit, we also deserve to die (Romans 5:12). Sin is darkness. Sin causes pain. *For the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). Sin brings fear with it.

Thankfully, through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ overcame sin and death for us. *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear* (1 John 4:15–18).

Through the faith in Him God gives us through His Word and when we are baptized, He leads us to turn our fears and anxieties over to Him as we trust in His almighty power. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, He forgives our sins and releases us from the guilt, pain, and darkness they cause. Through the bread and wine, Christ's true body and blood, God strengthens us to follow Him and to serve Him. Whenever we are afraid, He comforts us with ... *His peace that surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You are all-powerful and all-knowing. Your love for us is forever! From Adam and Eve's first sin, You promised to save us from the eternal death that sin brings. You gave us the gift of salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus. Even though we know Jesus has conquered sin, death, and the devil, there are still many things on this earth that cause us to be afraid. Please give us the wisdom to hand those fears to You so that Your peace may wash over us. In Jesus' saving name we pray. Amen.

Afraid of What?

Written by Lisa Rhonemus, Cincinnati, Ohio

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League 2019



Faith Over Fear Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles, hymnals, and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Putting Our Fears Before Us

There are many things which can cause us to be afraid while we live in this sin-filled world. When Jesus taught His disciples to recognize the signs of the end, He counseled them, *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars* (Matthew 24:6). That signpost is as large as ever today. But there are many other causes of fear in our lives which may loom as large or perhaps larger because of their proximity. Criticism, conflict, divorce, growing old, poverty, as well as a diagnosis of cancer or other serious disease can all introduce fear. Spend some time in your group (or divide into smaller groups) and list fears that invade your thoughts or the lives of those you know. (We will take a second look at them toward the end of our study.)

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, we praise and thank You for being with us always. We know that we can count on You to help us at all times, especially at times when we are afraid. Be with us as we study Your Word today. Open our hearts and our minds to the truths You want us to know as we explore how faith in You conquers all fear. In Your saving name we pray. Amen.

The Face Of Fear In Scripture

Fear is as old as the Garden of Eden. Read Genesis 3:8–10. What was the basis of Adam's fear? _____

Why was his fear an understandable one? _____

Read 2 Kings 6:8–23. Two people in this narrative express fear. List the fears of:

The King of Syria (v. 11): _____

Elisha's servant (v. 15): _____

What was Elisha's antidote to his servant's fear (v. 17)? _____

Because Elisha trusted God, rather than listen to the voice of fear, he was able to be the ultimate diplomat as God worked through him to save both the Syrians and the Israelites from the consequences of war. If both the King of Syria and Elisha's servant had been able to see the bigger picture, would they have been afraid? _____

Read Isaiah 6:1–5, Luke 1:11–12, and Luke 2:8–9. What is often the first response of someone when they see God or His angel(s)? _____

Read Isaiah 6:6–7, Luke 1:13, and Luke 2:10. What is God's Word to those overwhelmed with fear of Him or His angel? _____

No Fear

In the children's story of *The Three Little Pigs*, the pigs dance while they sing, "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" They lived without fear – until it came knocking at their door. Read Genesis 6:11–12 and Luke 17:26–27. What was the attitude of people in Noah's day? _____

Read Genesis 19:1–9 and Luke 17:28–29. When Lot was living in Sodom, what was the attitude of his neighbors? _____

Unable to see what the future will bring, people often live free from fear. They cannot see the danger just ahead.

So we see that sometimes we humans are justified in our fear, sometimes our fear is based on inadequate knowledge, or sometimes we are ignorant of coming events and are unafraid even when there is reason to fear.

Jesus' Thoughts On Fear

Read Matthew 10:28 Who does Jesus say we are not to fear? _____

Who are those who can kill our bodies? _____

Who does Jesus say we should fear? _____

Who is the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell? _____

Like Adam, when we are aware of our sin and come face to face with God, our Judge, we have reason to be afraid. The reality is that we cannot keep God's Law perfectly as He demands. Because of the sin we have inherited from Adam as well as our own sins, we deserve to die eternally. Such a realization makes us quake with fear. But this, by the grace of God, is not where we, as believers in Christ, make our home.

Read Matthew 10:29–31. What comfort does Jesus give His disciples after telling them that they should fear the one who can condemn them to hell? _____

With these words, Jesus moves his disciples into the Gospel home of His love for us.

Read Romans 5:10 and John 11:25–26. What do these verses say Jesus has done for us? _____

Knowing that Jesus is your Savior, why do you no longer have to fear sin, death, and the devil? _____

Almighty Jesus

Fear of death is a universal fear. Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, and Luke 8:22–25 are three accounts of the same miraculous event. Why were the disciples afraid? _____

The disciples interpreted Jesus' lack of fear as indifference. Why could Jesus sleep through the storm? _____

To what did Jesus attribute the disciples' fear? _____

Jesus knows that until He returns to earth, we will face physical death. But our Lord also assures us that when we die, it is not the end. He told His disciples, ... *an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment* (John 5:28–29). This statement has potential to produce terrible fear in our hearts. We may wonder, "What if I haven't done enough good to merit this resurrection of life?"

What assurance does Ephesians 2:8–9 give us when we fear that we have not done enough good to merit eternal life? _____

What additional assurance do we read in 1 John 3:19–20? _____

Read 1 John 4:18. What can we do when fear invades our thoughts? _____

What To Do About Fear

Now return to the fears you listed at the beginning of this study. How does knowing that nothing can happen to you that is not known to God change the character of any of those fears? _____

How can viewing physical death, not as the worst thing that can happen, but as the transition to our eternal heavenly home make a difference concerning our fears? _____

Jesus does not deny that we will have trouble in this world. What does He say about those troubles and how we can view them in John 16:33? _____

Those who do not know Jesus as their Savior do not have this same comfort. They may, in fact, be like the people living in the time of Noah or Lot, blissfully unaware of what is coming. How does this shape your attitude toward them? _____

Fear is a human emotion. We have looked at various types of fear and lack of fear based on ignorance. We have learned that the gift of faith in God's love for us is the great antidote to fear. It brings us the peace of God which guards our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7). If we trust in our own ability to keep God's Law perfectly as He demands, there is reason to be afraid. But when we live in the house of God's love in Christ Jesus, fear loses its power over us.

Together, read out loud this reminder from our loving, forgiving, merciful God: *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior”* (Isaiah 43:1b–3a).

Closing Prayer: Lord, when our fears focus our eyes on **our** circumstances instead of on **You**, remind us that You have overcome the world. Because You have given us faith through Your means of grace: Your Word, Holy Baptism, and Your Supper, help us to know that we are secure in You. Help us also to share the good news of Your salvation with those who have everything to fear but don't know it. Give us Your patience toward them as we pray that they will be lead to faith in You, and to repent of their sins so that they will not perish but have eternal life. Amen.

Sing: “Have No Fear, Little Flock” LSB 735, LW 410

Faith Over Fear
Written by Jan Schmidt, Florissant, CO
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Faith Over Fear

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles, hymnals, and copies of the Bible study for attendees.]

Putting Our Fears Before Us

There are many things which can cause us to be afraid while we live in this sin-filled world. When Jesus taught His disciples to recognize the signs of the end, He counseled them, *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars* (Matthew 24:6). That signpost is as large as ever today. But there are many other causes of fear in our lives which may loom as large or perhaps larger because of their proximity. Criticism, conflict, divorce, growing old, poverty, as well as a diagnosis of cancer or other serious disease can all introduce fear. Spend some time in your group (or divide into smaller groups) and list fears that invade your thoughts or the lives of those you know. (We will take a second look at them toward the end of our study.)

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, we praise and thank You for being with us always. We know that we can count on You to help us at all times, especially at times when we are afraid. Be with us as we study Your Word today. Open our hearts and our minds to the truths You want us to know as we explore how faith in You conquers all fear. In Your saving name we pray. Amen.

The Face Of Fear In Scripture

Fear is as old as the Garden of Eden. Read Genesis 3:8-10. What was the basis of Adam's fear? His nakedness because he could not hide his disobedience from God.

Why was his fear an understandable fear? Fear of God's judgement is certainly a reasonable fear.

Read 2 Kings 6:8-23. Two people in this narrative express fear. List the fears of:

The King of Syria (v. 11). The king was afraid because there was a spy in their midst.

Elisha's servant (v. 15). Elisha's servant was afraid because the Israelites were surrounded by the Syrian army.

What was Elisha's antidote to his servant's fear (v. 17)? Elisha prayed that the servant's eyes would be opened to see the armies of God who were there to protect them.

Because Elisha trusted God, rather than listen to the voice of fear, he was able to be the ultimate diplomat, as God worked through him to save both the Syrians and the Israelites from the consequences of war. If both the King of Syria and Elisha's servant had been able to see the bigger picture, would they have been afraid? If both men saw the bigger picture, it is likely the conflict would not have become as heated so the fear would not have been as great.

Read Isaiah 6:1-5, Luke 1:11-12, and Luke 2:8-9. What is often the first response of someone when they see God or His angel(s)? They express fear.

Read Isaiah 6:6–7, Luke 1:13, and Luke 2:10. What is God's Word to those overwhelmed with fear of Him or His angel? They are told to “Fear not.”

No Fear

In the children's story of *The Three Little Pigs*, the pigs dance while they sing, “Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?” They lived without fear – until it came knocking at their door. Read Genesis 6:11–12 and Luke 17:26–27. What was the attitude of people in Noah's day? They went about their everyday lives ignorant of what was about to happen.

Read Genesis 19:1–9 and Luke 17:28–29. When Lot was living in Sodom, what was the attitude of his neighbors? They lived without fear of the consequences of their sin. They likely did not even know their actions were sinful as they did not know God.

Unable to see what the future will bring, people often live free from fear. They cannot see the danger just ahead.

So we see that sometimes we humans are justified in our fear, sometimes our fear is based on inadequate knowledge, or sometimes we are ignorant of coming events and are unafraid even when there is reason to fear.

Jesus' Thoughts On Fear

Read Matthew 10:28. Who does Jesus say we are not to fear? We are not to fear those who can kill our bodies.

Who are those who can kill our bodies? Those who can kill our bodies are other people and Satan.

Who does Jesus say we should fear? Jesus says we are to fear the one who can send both body and soul to hell.

Who is the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell? Only God is able to condemn an individual to hell.

Like Adam, when we are aware of our sin and come face to face with God our Judge, we have reason to be afraid. The reality is that we cannot keep God's Law perfectly as He demands. Because of the sin we have inherited from Adam as well as our own sins, we deserve to die eternally. Such a realization makes us quake with fear. But this, by the grace of God, is not where we, as believers in Christ, make our home.

Read Matthew 10:29–31. What comfort does Jesus give His disciples after telling them that they should fear the one who can condemn them to hell? Jesus tells His disciples they don't need to be afraid for God values us much more than the birds to which He also gives care.

With these words, Jesus moves his disciples and into the Gospel home of His love for us.

Read Romans 5:10 and John 11:25–26. What do these verses say Jesus has done for us? Romans 5:10 reminds us that even when we were God's enemies because of our sin, His Son, Jesus, reconciled us with God through His death on the cross. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus saved our lives from eternal death in hell. In John 11:25–26 Jesus Himself assures us that *everyone who lives and believes in me will never die* (v.26).

Knowing that Jesus is your Savior, why do you no longer have to fear sin, death, and the devil? Because of the faith which God has given us through His Word and the water of Holy Baptism, we trust that through His death and resurrection, Jesus has conquered sin, death, and the devil. As His baptized children, we know that we belong to God. Through Holy Communion, our faith is strengthened in Jesus' saving power. Through faith, we believe God's promise that *neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38–39).

Almighty Jesus

Fear of death is a universal fear. Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, and Luke 8:22–25 are three accounts of the same miraculous event. Read each account. Why were the disciples afraid? They feared they would lose their lives in the storm.

The disciples interpreted Jesus' lack of fear as indifference. Why could Jesus sleep through the storm? Jesus knew His ministry was not over. As true God, Jesus also knew that He had the power to keep the disciples safe.

To what did Jesus attribute the disciples' fear? Jesus attributed their fear to their lack of faith.

Jesus knows that until He returns to earth, we will face physical death. But our Lord also assures us that when we die, it is not the end. He told His disciples, *...an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment* (John 5:28–29). This statement has potential to produce terrible fear in our hearts. We may wonder, “What if I haven't done enough good to merit this resurrection of life?”

What assurance does Ephesians 2:8–9 give us when we fear that we have not done enough good to merit eternal life? It is not our good works that saves us. Salvation and eternal life are God's gifts through faith.

What additional assurance do we read in 1 John 3:19–20? Our hearts (thoughts) may condemn us, but God is greater than our hearts (v.20).

Read 1 John 4:18. What can we do when fear invades our thoughts? Pray that God's perfect love will cast out our fear of punishment.

What To Do About Fear

Now return to the fears you listed at the beginning of this study. How does knowing that nothing can happen to you that is not known to God change the character of any of those fears?

Knowing that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus can help us to ignore those fears. When we remember that Jesus has done it all for us through His death and resurrection, we are comforted. As we recall that God's power is stronger than anything, we know that we can trust in Him to help us.

How can viewing physical death, not as the worst thing that can happen, but as the transition to our eternal heavenly home make a difference concerning our fears? Jesus promises to be with us always (Matthew 28:20b). We can do all things, even face physical death, through Him who strengthens us.

Jesus does not deny that we will have trouble in this world. What does He say about those troubles and how we can view them in John 16:33? We can have peace because Jesus has overcome the world.

Those who do not know Jesus as their Savior do not have this same comfort. They may, in fact, be like the people living in the time of Noah or Lot, blissfully unaware of what is coming. How does this shape your attitude toward them? We are called by our Lord Himself to tell others about His saving love. Through always loving, Gospel-led language, out of concern for an individual's spiritual health, the Holy Spirit helps us to humbly speak to another concerning her sin (Matthew 18:15). Jesus' parable of the lost sheep also reminds us that we are to seek out those who are away from God and to share His Word with them (Matthew 18:10–14).

Fear is a human emotion. We have looked at various types of fear and lack of fear based on ignorance. We have learned that the gift of faith in God's love for us is the great antidote to fear. It brings us the peace of God which guards our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7). If we trust in our own ability to keep God's Law perfectly as He demands, there is reason to be afraid. But when we live in the house of God's love in Christ Jesus, fear loses its power over us.

Together, read out loud this reminder from our loving, merciful, forgiving God: *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior”* (Isaiah 43:1b–3a).

Closing Prayer: Lord, when our fears focus our eyes on **our** circumstances instead of on **You**, remind us that You have overcome the world. Because You have given us faith through Your means of grace: Your Word, Holy Baptism, and Your Supper, help us to know that we are secure in You. Help us also to share the good news of Your salvation with those who have everything to fear but don't know it. Give us Your patience toward them as we pray that they will be led to faith in You and to repent of their sins so that they will not perish but will have eternal life. Amen.

Sing: “Have No Fear, Little Flock” LSB 735, LW 410

Faith Over Fear
Leader's Guide
Written by Jan Schmidt, Florissant, CO
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Compassionate Caring Devotion

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1–2).

Let's begin this devotion with a few questions. Please answer each one by a show of hands.

How many of you make a daily phone call to a friend or relative to make sure he or she is okay?

How many of you make time to take a friend or relative shopping or to a doctor appointment during the week?

How many of you help a friend or relative with organizing his or her bills or paperwork?

How many of you regularly visit a friend or relative who is homebound or in a nursing home?

If you do any of the above, you are performing compassionate care for someone in your life. Too often people think compassionate care is a twenty-four hour, seven day a week commitment. In reality, giving even an hour per week can be a tremendous blessing to someone with a chronic illness who is homebound or in a nursing home.

I received that call that many of us dread—a relative with a chronic illness needed help and I was the only option available. In calls like these, human nature immediately focuses on the high level of commitment that may be required. How much time will I need to spend helping this person? How will this alter my life? Isn't there someone else who can help rather than me?

Having all these thoughts and concerns doesn't make a person horrible. It is very appropriate to consider the challenges you may encounter as you attempt to care for another person. However, something more should go into your consideration than just the impact on you that providing compassionate care might have.

As Christians we are always challenged to consider the needs of others. Philippians 2:3–4 reminds us, *Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Holy Scripture also shares the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who always allowed love and compassion to motivate how He treated others. Matthew 9:36 tells us, *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, for they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* In Matthew 14:14, we are told, *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.* When Jesus encountered two blind men outside of Jericho, *Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him (Matthew 20:34).*

Amazingly, once I moved beyond the dread of the task of being a compassionate caregiver, I found that God sent me enough help so that the task was not nearly as taxing as I anticipated. By asking and allowing my decisions to be guided by the Holy Spirit, I now find caring for my relative to be a true blessing.

The theme verse for this devotion from Ephesians 5 encourages us to be *imitators of God*. Following His example, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to allow the love of God to motivate us so that we can share our time and concern with someone God has set in our lives.

If you live long enough, someone will need your compassionate care and you will eventually need someone's care and assistance as well. When overwhelmed in a given moment, always remember Paul's proclamation, *I can do all things through him who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13). God never asks us to do something He will not support, uplift, and bless.

Closing Prayer: Lord, You are my Source of strength and my Guide for compassion. Please help me to think of those in need and give me the desire to share my time and compassion with someone in need. May You be glorified in all I share and do. This I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, my Lord. Amen.

Compassionate Caring
Written by: Rev. Dr. John F. Johnson, Washington, DC
Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



How to Show Christ's Compassion to Those Who Face Chronic Conditions

Bible Study

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, hymnals]

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for making us all unique and with special talents to serve you. Bless us as we explore how to serve those with chronic or debilitating conditions. Open our hearts to serve You through compassionate service to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Laying Some Groundwork For This Study

Think back to the last time you had a cold, a stomach ache, a sore throat, sprained ankle, or some other short-lived ailment. What are some things that your spouse, family member, or friend, did for you to help you feel better?

What have you done to help someone else in a similar condition? _____

While these kinds of short-term illnesses and conditions can be painful and uncomfortable, usually in a few days we are healed through Jesus' power and means and we are once again able to get back to our normal routines. Even if we have to visit a physician for such issues, we are usually able to get an answer concerning how long our symptoms will last as well as help to end them.

This is not the case for individuals with chronic medical conditions. A chronic medical condition can be defined as one that lasts for three months or longer and which has no specific cure. Such conditions can cause constant discomfort or have symptoms that begin, end for a time, then begin again. Some examples of chronic medical conditions include Alzheimer's disease and dementia, arthritis, asthma, Crohn's disease, epilepsy, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease. The National Health Council estimates that 133 million Americans (about 40% of the population) suffer from a chronic medical condition (www.nationalhealthcouncil.org).

Think again for a moment about the last cold, stomach ache, sore throat, or other short-lived ailment you experienced. What if the physical, mental, and emotional symptoms you felt during this illness persisted for months instead of a few days or a week? How might such a condition change your life? _____

A Biblical Example Of A Chronic Condition

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10. In verses 1–4, Paul vaguely refers to a miraculous event that God caused in his life. Paul goes on to say that what *he heard cannot be told* (v. 4). Paul does not boast about this experience, but instead, speaks about his *weaknesses* (v. 5).

According to verse 7, how does Paul describe his weakness? _____

The Bible does not reveal what Paul's illness was. In verse 8, what did Paul do concerning his illness? _____

What was God's reply? (See verse 9.) _____

By the power of the Holy Spirit, in faith, what was Paul's response (vv.9b–10)? _____

Read Philippians 4:11–13. Through all of his difficulties, including his chronic health condition, what did Paul learn? _____

Read Hebrews 4:14–16. On what can we rely in any difficulties, including living with a chronic condition? _____

Hebrews 4:16 says that in all our times of need we can come to God's throne of grace in *confidence*. Why can we do so? _____

Acute and chronic illnesses are a part of the world because of sin. However, what important clarification did Jesus make in John 9:1–3 concerning illness and an individual's specific sins?

How might the Bible truths from 1 Corinthians 12, Philippians 4, Hebrews 4, and John 9 provide comfort to an individual suffering from a chronic condition? _____

Compassionate Care

The word *compassion* means "sympathetic consciousness of other's distress together with a desire to alleviate it" (www.merriam-webster.com). Note that to show compassion involves not

just recognition of another's difficulty but also action. It can be said that compassion is two hearts pulling at one load.

The Compassion Of Our God

Psalm 103:13 says, *As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.*

Read Micah 7:18–19. How do we daily see God's compassion toward us? _____

We daily witness the power of God's compassion in our lives through His forgiveness. When Jesus walked the earth, He personally showed compassion to those with various physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Read each of the following Bible passages. How does Jesus demonstrate compassion in each one?

Mark 5:21–24a; 35–42: _____

Mark 5:24b–34: _____

Mark 6:34–44: _____

Luke 19:1–10: _____

John 11:28–35: _____

John 13:1–12: _____

Jesus is the ultimate model of compassion. Jesus “knows my need and well provides me” (“I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb” LSB 740, v. 1, Public Domain). The Bible documents Jesus’ compassionate care for others as He listened and understood, taught, fed, helped and even healed many.

Jesus’ compassion for all people was shown in the greatest way when He suffered and died on the cross to save us from the worst chronic and debilitating condition that affects us all—sin. When Jesus rose from the dead, He showed the power He has over all things. His resurrection proves that we can trust in His compassionate care for us in every condition in which we find ourselves.

As they live here on earth, a person with a chronic condition may not find relief from suffering through complete or even partial healing. How can the truth that Jesus died and rose for all people provide comfort? _____

Showing Christ's Compassion

Jesus said, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"* (John 15:12). We see such love shown to Paul by Christians in Galatia and Philippi as they cared for his chronic condition.

Read Galatians 4:12–14. How did the Galatians show Paul compassion? _____

Read Philippians 4:10a and 14. How did the people of Philippi show Paul compassion? _____

In both these instances, Christians were led by the Holy Spirit to show compassion to Paul. Today, the Holy Spirit works in us and through us to show compassion to those who are hurting.

To help someone with a chronic illness or condition it is important to understand the condition with which he or she has been diagnosed. One way to accomplish this can be by contacting the national association for the particular chronic illness. Reliable information explaining many chronic conditions can be found through these websites:

<http://www.healthfinder.gov/organizations/OrgListing.asp> and <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>. I have Multiple Sclerosis, one of many chronic illnesses that are difficult to identify simply by looking at an individual. The National Association of Multiple Sclerosis provides several learning videos and literature that will define the disease and the signs and symptoms that affect some MS individuals. By gaining this understanding, you will be able to connect with the person with MS. With any chronic condition, you can provide better support when you know how a disease might affect an individual. National nonprofit groups such as the National Association of Multiple Sclerosis, the American Heart Association, and many others can be located through this website: <http://www.health.gov/nhic/#Referrals>.

Another way to show compassion to those with chronic illnesses is to actively listen to them. Active listening is to look at a situation from that individual's perspective, not yours. In active listening, you let an individual know that you've really heard them by saying back to them, in your own words, what she has told you. For example, if a person with a chronic condition expresses her distress concerning the fact that she is unable to continue her work or career, you might say back to her, "You must feel sad that you can't work anymore." It is helpful to any hurting individual to know that someone else understands how they feel. Showing compassion means to really care how someone else is feeling. It does not involve you sharing your personal experiences, opinions, or advice.

My mother was afflicted with Alzheimer's for 33 years. In the last few months of her life, I spent every Sunday afternoon with her. During the weekly church service at the facility in which she lived, we had fun singing hymns. Later, we talked about all kinds of topics. Most of the time in our conversations, we were in her world. I would just follow her lead. One time in her imagination she was playing cards with three friends. She would talk about her hand of cards and about how one of her friends was cheating. Soon it was time for bed. Mom wouldn't go to sleep because her friends were still there. I assured her they all went home and after 45 minutes convincing her, she finally agreed. Mom slept 10 hours that night and so did I.

How is this an example of active listening? _____

Another way to show compassion to a person with a chronic condition is to ask helpful questions. We may say to those with a chronic illness, "Call me if there's anything you need." While such a comment means well, it can be overwhelming to someone who needs many, many things. Instead, make your comments and questions more specific. For example, you might call the individual and say, "I'm getting ready to go to the grocery store. Is there anything that I can pick up for you while I'm there?" Such a request gives the person something specific to think about and respond to.

Sometimes a person with a chronic condition is too exhausted or physically unable to come to the door or answer the phone. In such situations, compassionate friends have placed a small refrigerator or cooler in the person's garage. On the front of the door is a list of items which the person needs. Friends frequently check the list and make sure that needed items are available without having to ask or disturb the person in need or their family members. An answering machine message or text message can then be left to let the individual know that needed items have been dropped off.

To show compassion to a person with a chronic condition is to be present for her. This might mean simply sitting at an individual's bedside as she rests if she is concerned about being alone. It might mean watching a favorite comedy DVD together. It might mean a daily short phone call just to say "hi." When I had a total knee replacement, it took me away from my sewing circle for two weeks. One Friday, on the way home from the doctor, we stopped by the sewing shop where my circle meets. Everyone in the room left their projects to come see me. The love I felt that day was just what I needed to motivate me to follow my doctor's orders so that I could eventually return to my sewing circle. When a chronic illness prevents an individual from leaving her home, get the group together and bring her favorite activity to her.

Sharing The Hope Of Jesus

Compassionate care is sharing the hope Jesus gives with the one who is chronically ill. Most chronic conditions are incurable on this side of heaven. Some of these conditions have few methods to provide the affected individual much relief from discomfort and pain. Constant pain can wear down even individuals with a strong faith in Jesus. Compassionate care includes sharing the sure and certain promises concerning strength and hope found in God's Word.

Summarize the hope God gives as described in each of these Scripture references:

Psalms 119:76: _____

Isaiah 49:13: _____

Micah 7:7: _____

John 10:27-28: _____

John 14:27: _____

Romans 8:35, 37–39: _____

Hebrews 13:6: _____

Revelation 21:1–4: _____

A woman who faced a breast cancer diagnosis and uncertainty concerning the success of her upcoming treatments, once said, “Either I will get to be with Jesus in heaven or I will get to stay here on earth and rock my grandbabies.” How does this comment reflect Paul’s words in Philippians 1:21? _____

For a Christian, it’s a win-win situation: any time left here on earth provides more time to enjoy family and friends. Physical death takes those who trust in Jesus “home” to their Lord in heaven where *“death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:4). How can we lose?

We are called to proclaim Christ to everyone. Non-Christians do not know the hope and eternal life that is found in Jesus. For a non-Christian with a chronic condition, this situation is made all the more hopeless as their earthly lives are filled with pain and problems. What truths from this Bible study might the Holy Spirit help you share with a person with a chronic condition who does not know Jesus? _____

Closing Prayer: Sing or pray “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less,” LSB 575/576, TLH 370, LW 368.

How to Show Christ’s Compassion to Those Who Face Chronic Conditions
Written by Tina Landskroener, Quincy, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



How to Show Christ's Compassion to Those Who Face Chronic Conditions

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, hymnals]

Opening Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for making us all unique and with special talents to serve you. Bless us as we explore how to serve those with chronic or debilitating conditions. Open our hearts to serve You through compassionate service to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Laying Some Groundwork For This Study

Think back to the last time you had a cold, a stomach ache, a sore throat, sprained ankle, or some other short-lived ailment. What are some things that your spouse, family member, or friend, did for you to help you feel better? Encourage participants to share.

What have you done to help someone else in a similar condition? Encourage participants to share.

While these kinds of short-term illnesses and conditions can be painful and uncomfortable, usually in a few days we are healed through Jesus' power and means and we are once again able to get back to our normal routines. Even if we have to visit a physician for such issues, we are usually able to get an answer concerning how long our symptoms will last as well as help to end them.

This is not the case for individuals with chronic medical conditions. A chronic medical condition can be defined as one that lasts for three months or longer and which has no specific cure. Such conditions can cause constant discomfort or have symptoms that begin, end for a time, then begin again. Some examples of chronic medical conditions include Alzheimer's disease and dementia, arthritis, asthma, Crohn's disease, epilepsy, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease. The National Health Council estimates that 133 million Americans (about 40% of the population) suffer from a chronic medical condition (www.nationalhealthcouncil.org).

Think again for a moment about the last cold, stomach ache, sore throat, or other short-lived ailment you experienced. What if the physical, mental, and emotional symptoms you felt during this illness persisted for months instead of a few days or a week? How might such a condition change your life? Lead participants to consider the new challenges and difficulties that would come from facing a chronic condition.

A Biblical Example Of A Chronic Condition

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10. In verses 1–4, Paul vaguely refers to a miraculous event that God caused in his life. Paul goes on to say that what *he heard cannot be told* (v. 4). Paul does not boast about this experience, but instead, speaks about his *weaknesses* (v. 5).

According to verse 7, how does Paul describe his weakness? Paul describes his weakness as a thorn ... in the flesh.

The Bible does not reveal what Paul's illness was. In verse 8, what did Paul do concerning his illness? Paul says that three times he pleaded with the Lord to remove his condition.

What was God's reply? (See verse 9.) God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. God did not remove or cure Paul's chronic condition, but instead used it as a way to strengthen Paul's faith and to lead him to more fully rely on Jesus' power.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, in faith, what was Paul's response (vv.9b–10)? Paul said that for Jesus' sake, he was content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. In his physical and emotional weaknesses, Paul found strength in Christ.

Read Philippians 4:11–13. Through all of his difficulties, including his chronic health condition, what did Paul learn? Paul learned to be content (v.11). He learned that the secret of facing any difficult situation was to rely on Jesus' strength (v.13).

Read Hebrews 4:14–16. On what can we rely in any difficulties, including living with a chronic condition? In anything, we can rely on Jesus, our great high priest (v. 14). Jesus understands everything we face.

Hebrews 4:16 says that in all our times of need we can come to God's throne of grace in confidence. Why can we do so? We can come to God's throne in confidence because we know God will be merciful towards us and will help us for Jesus' sake. Jesus paid the price we owed God for our sins when He suffered and died for us on the cross. Jesus' sacrificial actions brought us back to God. All who trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Acute and chronic illnesses are a part of the world because of sin. However, what important clarification did Jesus make in John 9:1–3 concerning illness and an individual's specific sins? Jesus told His disciples that the man was born blind not because of a specific sin that either the man or his parents committed. Through the healing of this man, Jesus was able to show the works of God (v. 3); that is, physical healing as well as healing from the spiritual blindness our sins cause us.

How might the Bible truths from 1 Corinthians 12, Philippians 4, Hebrews 4, and John 9 provide comfort to an individual suffering from a chronic condition? Encourage participants to focus on the strength and comfort Jesus gives us no matter what difficulties we face.

Compassionate Care

The word *compassion* means "sympathetic consciousness of other's distress together with a desire to alleviate it" (www.merriam-webster.com). Note that to show compassion involves not just recognition of another's difficulty but also action. It can be said that compassion is two hearts pulling at one load.

The Compassion Of Our God

Psalm 103:13 says, *As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.*

Read Micah 7:18–19. How do we daily see God's compassion toward us? God's love for us is constant. He shows us His compassion as He daily forgives our sins for Jesus' sake.

We daily witness the power of God's compassion in our lives through His forgiveness. When Jesus walked the earth, He personally showed compassion to those with various physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Read each of the following Bible passages. How does Jesus demonstrate compassion in each one?

Mark 5:21–24a; 35–42: In compassion, Jesus recognized the faith of Jairus and the sincerity of his plea for help for his daughter. Jesus *went with him* (v. 24a) and brought Jairus' daughter back to life (v. 42).

Mark 5:24b–34: In compassion, Jesus recognized the faith of the woman with the chronic bleeding condition and healed her.

Mark 6:34–44: In compassion, Jesus realized that the crowd that had gathered needed someone to teach them the truth about God. So he taught them *many things* (v.34). Jesus also had compassion concerning their physical need for food and so miraculously fed them with only two fish and five loaves of bread (vv.38–44).

Luke 19:1–10: Jesus felt compassion for Zacchaeus, the sinful tax collector. Jesus led Zacchaeus to see his sinful ways and to repent of them. Jesus forgave Zacchaeus his sins and welcomed him into His family of believers.

John 11:28–35: At Lazarus' tomb, Jesus felt the sorrow of Lazarus' loved ones. When Jesus saw Lazarus' sister, Mary, crying, Jesus was *deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled* (v.33) Jesus was genuinely empathetic concerning their loss. Jesus showed His compassion for Lazarus' loved ones when He Himself *wept* (v. 35).

John 13:1–12: Jesus showed compassion and love for His disciples as He served them when He washed their feet. This action “demonstrated the self-sacrifice and love that He would show the next day on the cross (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH ©2009, study note on John 13:12, p. 1808).

Jesus is the ultimate model of compassion. Jesus “knows my need and well provides me” (“I Am Jesus' Little Lamb” LSB 740, v. 1, Public Domain). The Bible documents Jesus' compassionate care for others as He listened and understood, taught, fed, helped, and even healed many.

Jesus' compassion for all people was shown in the greatest way when He suffered and died on the cross to save us from the worst chronic and debilitating condition that affects us all—sin. When Jesus rose from the dead, He showed the power He has over all things. His resurrection proves that we can trust in His compassionate care for us in every condition in which we find ourselves.

While here on earth, a person with a chronic condition may not find relief from suffering through complete or even partial healing. How can the truth that Jesus died and rose for all provide comfort? Through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, we have the sure and certain hope of forgiveness and of eternal life. God promises us a home in heaven where we will have no more pain and suffering. Because through faith in Jesus, we have a promised home in heaven, it is a comfort to know that our time of suffering on earth is only temporary. Jesus' death and resurrection also assures us of God's great and constant love for us.

Showing Christ's Compassion

Jesus said, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"* (John 15:12). We see such love shown to Paul by Christians in Galatia and Philippi as they cared for his chronic condition.

Read Galatians 4:12–14. How did the Galatians show Paul compassion? Despite Paul's condition, the Galatian Christians did not *scorn or despise* him (v.14). Instead they received him *as an angel of God*, in other words, God's messenger.

Read Philippians 4:10a and 14. How did the people of Philippi show Paul compassion? The Christians in Philippi showed *concern* for Paul (v. 10a). They *share[d]* his *trouble* (v. 14).

In both these instances, Christians were led by the Holy Spirit to show compassion to Paul. Today, the Holy Spirit works in us and through us to show compassion to those who are hurting.

To help someone with a chronic illness or condition it is important to understand the condition with which he or she has been diagnosed. One way to accomplish this can be by contacting the national association for the particular chronic illness. Reliable information explaining many chronic conditions can be found through these websites:

<http://www.healthfinder.gov/organizations/OrgListing.asp> and <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>. I have Multiple Sclerosis, one of many chronic illnesses that are difficult to identify simply by looking at an individual. The National Association of Multiple Sclerosis provides several learning videos and literature that will define the disease and the signs and symptoms that affect some MS individuals. By gaining this understanding, you will be able to connect with the person with MS. With any chronic condition, you can provide better support when you know how a disease might affect an individual. National nonprofit groups such as the National Association of Multiple Sclerosis, the American Heart Association, and many others can be located through this website: <http://www.health.gov/nhic/#Referrals>.

Another way to show compassion to those with chronic illnesses is to actively listen to them. Active listening is to look at a situation from that individual's perspective, not yours. In active listening, you let an individual know that you've really heard them by saying back to them, in your own words, what she has told you. For example, if a person with a chronic condition expresses her distress concerning the fact that she is unable to continue her work or career, you might say back to her, "You must feel sad that you can't work anymore." It is helpful to any hurting individual to know that someone else understands how they feel. Showing compassion means to really care how someone else is feeling. It does not involve you sharing your personal experiences, opinions, or advice.

My mother was afflicted with Alzheimer's for 33 years. In the last few months of her life, I spent every Sunday afternoon with her. During the weekly church service at the facility in which she lived, we had fun singing hymns. Later, we talked about all kinds of topics. Most of the time in our conversations, we were in her world. I would just follow her lead. One time in her imagination she was playing cards with three friends. She would talk about her hand of cards and about how one of her friends was cheating. Soon it was time for bed. Mom wouldn't go to sleep because her friends were still there. I assured her they all went home and after 45 minutes convincing her, she finally agreed. Mom slept 10 hours that night and so did I.

How is this an example of active listening? The author let her mother take the lead in the conversation. Rather than trying to dissuade her from her conversation, the author calmly allowed her

mother to talk about what she wanted. The author offered assurance to her mother. Through the author's active listening, her mother felt secure and heard.

Another way to show compassion to a person with a chronic condition is to ask helpful questions. We may say to those with a chronic illness, "Call me if there's anything you need." While such a comment means well, it can be overwhelming to someone who needs many, many things. Instead, make your comments and questions more specific. For example, you might call the individual and say, "I'm getting ready to go to the grocery store. Is there anything that I can pick up for you while I'm there?" Such a request gives the person something specific to think about and respond to.

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To show compassion to a person with a chronic condition is to be present for her. This might mean simply sitting at an individual's bedside as she rests if she is concerned about being alone. It might mean watching a favorite comedy DVD together. It might mean a daily short phone call just to say "hi." When I had a total knee replacement, it took me away from my sewing circle for two weeks. One Friday on the way home from the doctor, we stopped by the sewing shop where my circle meets. Everyone in the room left their projects to come see me. The love I felt that day was just what I needed to motivate me to follow my doctor's orders so that I could eventually return to my sewing circle. When a chronic illness prevents an individual from leaving her home, get the group together and bring her favorite activity to her.

Sharing The Hope Of Jesus

Compassionate care is sharing the hope Jesus gives with the one who is chronically ill. Most chronic conditions are incurable on this side of heaven. Some of these conditions have few methods to provide the affected individual much relief from discomfort and pain. Constant pain can wear down even individuals with a strong faith in Jesus. Compassionate care includes sharing the sure and certain promises concerning strength and hope found in God's Word.

Summarize the hope God gives as described in each of these Scripture references:

Psalms 119:76: God always loves us.

Isaiah 49:13: God has compassion toward us, his afflicted.

Micah 7:7: God saves us and He hears us.

John 10:27-28: Jesus knows us and will not allow anyone or anything to take us from Him. Jesus gives us eternal life.

John 14:27: Jesus gives us peace. He calms our fears.

Romans 8:35, 37–39: God promises that nothing can separate us from Him and from His love for us in Jesus.

Hebrews 13:6: God is our helper. We do not have to be afraid of anything that man or the world can do to us because God is almighty.

Revelation 21:1–4: In heaven, God will live with us. *He will wipe away every tear ... death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore* (v. 4).

A woman who faced a breast cancer diagnosis and uncertainty concerning the success of her upcoming treatments, once said, “Either I will get to be with Jesus in heaven or I will get to stay here on earth and rock my grandbabies.” How does this comment reflect Paul’s words in Philippians 1:21? For a Christian, it’s good here on earth, and it will be even better when we reach our heavenly home.

For a Christian, it’s a win-win situation: any time left here on earth provides more time to enjoy family and friends. Physical death takes those who trust in Jesus “home” to their Lord in heaven where “*death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away*” (Revelation 21:4). How can we lose?

We are called to proclaim Christ to everyone. Non-Christians do not know the hope and eternal life that is found in Jesus. For a non-Christian with a chronic condition, this situation is made all the more hopeless as their earthly lives are filled with pain and problems. What truths from this Bible study might the Holy Spirit help you share with a person with a chronic condition who does not know Jesus? What a joy and privilege it is to share Jesus with someone who does not know the hope found only in Him! God can use a chronic illness not only to bring us to an individual that needs to hear the Gospel, but God can also use such a condition to make an individual’s heart more receptive to the Gospel message. Help participants to focus on specific passages from this study that they would want to share in such a situation. Discuss together how to present God’s plan of salvation in a compassionate way that focuses on God’s love for the particular individual, and His desire that everyone comes to saving faith in Jesus (1 Timothy 2:3–4).

Closing Prayer: Sing or pray “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less,” LSB 575/576, TLH 370, LW 368.

How to Show Christ’s Compassion to Those Who Face Chronic Conditions
Leader’s Guide

Written by Tina Landskroener, Quincy, Illinois
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



Jesus' Servants Devotion

Through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13b)

Do you ever think it's a burden to be a Christian? All those things God commands us to do, all those things people expect us to do, can really wear us out. Is being a Christian really supposed to be like that?

Through love serve one another, the Apostle Paul writes. As we hear or read this verse, we might think that yet another heavy expectation is laid upon us. The Bible tells us that we are not only to serve others, we are also to *love* them. As we all know, there are some people who are not all that easy to like. Even with our loved ones, at times we may find ourselves worn out by all the things we do for them. At such times, we might almost forget that we do indeed love them. We might almost forget that we even *like* them. This is what happens when we, Jesus' servants, rely on our own definition of love. As sinners, our love for others is inconsistent at best. Our desire to serve others is often weak or even non-existent.

When Holy Scripture tells us to serve one another, it means we are to serve them through the love of God. The love of God is not that He likes us and cannot get over how wonderful we are. God's love is this: that His Son came to suffer for our salvation, to bear for us His own judgment against all the evil we have done and continue to do against Him. God's love for us in Christ Jesus saves us from sin, death, and the devil. God's love for us in Christ Jesus is constant and unchanging, despite what we may do, think, or say. God's love for us is sacrificial. God's love for us is the kind of love that God calls us to depend upon to serve others.

God's love comes to us in His Word. This Word is the written Word of Holy Scripture and it is the Word: Jesus Himself (John 1:1–4). When we are baptized, the Holy Spirit gives us faith, forgiveness for our sins, a new, eternal life, and the strength to live and serve as members of God's family. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God's love lives and is at work in us. God's love motivates us to serve others as His servants who follow in the steps of Jesus. Through the sacrificial love of God, we are enabled to serve others with the same kind of love in which our God serves us. *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us* (1 John 4:10–12).

There will sometimes be challenges to serve others through love. At such times, through faith, God will work His love in us. When we find ourselves worn out, the Holy Spirit will strengthen us and help us to continue to serve others in His love. When we fall short, we can be certain that our sins and shortcomings are all forgiven and gone, dealt with and done away with through Jesus' suffering and death. Through the love of God working in our hearts, we are empowered to serve others as Jesus' servants.

Closing Prayer: Lord and Savior Jesus, we give You thanks that You loved us so much that You suffered, died, and rose again so that we are saved from our sins and have eternal life through the faith in You which You give us. Bind our hearts to Your living, forgiving, and serving

love. May Your Word of love do its work of love in us, so that we may serve You by serving others through Your love. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Jesus' Servants

Written by: Pastor Jais H. Tinglund, Greybull, Wyoming

Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



God's True Desire for His Children

Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study for attendees, Bibles, copies of the LWML Pledge (found in the last section of this *reSOURCEs* manual), and hymnals]

It can be said that God's true desire for us, His children, is more in our recognition of Whose we are rather than in what we do. As His servants here on earth, God desires that *through love* [we] *serve one another* (Galatians 5:13b). In this study, we will focus on Whose we are and on what God desires for us, so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may serve others with the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Opening Prayer: Lord God, send Your Holy Spirit to work in us so that we might better understand who we are in You and how we might better reflect You as we serve others through Your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Who We Were

Read Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12, and Ephesians 2:1–3. Based on these verses, describe what you were like before faith in Jesus. _____

Separated from God by both the sin we inherit and by the sins we commit, we are in need of rescue. Without faith in Jesus, we are God's enemies who justly deserve eternal suffering and death.

Read John 3:16. Why did God rescue us? _____

How did He do so? See also 1 Peter 2:24. _____

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for having rescued us from eternal death through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Whose We Are Now

Jesus died so that we "might live with Him and for Him in peace and joy, now and forever" (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH ©2017, Question 176, p. 189).

Through the faith given to us through God's Word and the water of Holy Baptism, we no longer belong to the world and to our sinful flesh. Instead, we are united with Christ by faith. Jesus is ours and we are His.

What do each of the following verses say concerning what it means to belong to Jesus?

Romans 14:8: _____

Galatians 2:20: _____

Titus 2:14: _____

1 Peter 2:9: _____

God desires that as His children we live by faith for Him. By the power of the Holy Spirit as His redeemed people, we are to proclaim Him and to do good works in His name.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for making us Yours through faith in Jesus our Savior. As Your children, help us to live for You as we serve You and others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Serving As Jesus' Servants

As we remember that we belong to God, how does God desire us to be as we live for Him? How does knowing who He desires us to be empower us as we serve Him and others?

To begin thinking about how God desires us to be, read Ephesians 4:32 out loud with the others in your group. According to this verse, what are three things God desires us to be?

1. _____ to one another,
2. _____,
3. _____ one another as God in Christ _____ you.

What does it mean to *be kind* to one another? _____

Why is being kind an important attribute? _____

Name some specific ways you can show kindness as you serve the Lord by serving others.

Prayer: Lord God, daily You show amazing kindness to us as You love and forgive us. May You work in us so that we daily show this same kindness to all. Amen.

God also desires us to be *tenderhearted*. What does this mean? _____

Another word for tenderhearted is compassionate. Compassion can be defined as "two hearts pulling at one load." How is Jesus the perfect example of being tenderhearted? (See also Matthew 11:28.) _____

What special element does being tenderhearted bring to the serving opportunities God places before us? _____

Prayer: Lord God, inspire our hearts to be tenderhearted towards all with whom we come in contact today, just as You are tenderhearted to us. Amen.

Read Colossians 3:13. When we *bear(ing) with one another*, we understand the struggles of others because of our own struggles with temptation and sin (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH ©2009, study note for Colossians 3:13, p. 2047). How does having such an understanding help us serve others? _____

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins so that we might be forgiven. Help us to forgive others as You forgive us. Amen.

Read Ephesians 5:1–2. According to verse 1, how does God desire us to be? *Be _____ of God, as beloved children.*

According to verse 2, in what specific way does God want us to imitate Him? _____

Why is sacrificial love at the heart of serving God? _____

What can make sacrificial service in love so difficult? _____

Read Ephesians 4:24. How is it possible for us to serve others in the way that Jesus serves us?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Your life to save ours. Please work Your sacrificial love in our hearts so that we may imitate You by unselfishly serving others. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Read Ephesians 5:18b-21. With Whom are we to be filled? _____

How is this possible? _____

What is possible when the Holy Spirit works in us? _____

Name some specific situations where you can serve others with *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* (v. 19). _____

What does it mean to submit to another person? _____

Read Philippians 2:3–8. Jesus set aside the glory of heaven to submit to His Father’s will when He came to earth to serve us and to save us. How does knowing this help us to look to the needs of others as Jesus’ servants today? _____

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, You set aside Your glory to come to earth to humbly serve and to give Your life for us. Fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we may submit to Your will and submit to the needs of others. Put Your Word and Your song in our hearts so that we may serve others with the joy that comes from trusting You. Amen.

Read Colossians 3:15–17. While these verses are similar to those you previously read from Ephesians 5, some additional elements for serving others through love are added. What are we to let rule our hearts (v. 15)? _____

How does God desire us to be? _____

What is to *dwell in us richly* (v. 16)? _____

How are we to *do everything* (v. 17)? _____

How might knowing that this is what God desires change the way in which you currently serve Him? _____

Prayer: Dear Lord God, give us the desire to be of the same mind and having the same love so that others will want to know You. Replace our grumbling and complaining with an attitude of gratitude. Let us not be anxious but come to You in prayer with all our needs as You work in us so that we might serve others through Your love. Amen.

Read Romans 12:2. God desires that we *do not be conformed to this world, but to be* _____ *by the renewal of your mind.* When does God begin this transformation process in us? _____

When we study God’s Word, the Holy Spirit works in us to transform our thinking so that we will no longer be conformed to our own passions or to this world. How is this evident in your own life? _____

How does the transformation God is working in you allow you to be a servant for Him? _____

In a sentence or two, describe what God’s true desire is for you as His child? _____

Read Luke 1:37 and Philippians 4:13. What comfort and strength do these verses give you as you serve others as Jesus’ servant? _____

Closing Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, in Your Word you tell us what Your true desire is for us. Help us, gracious Lord, to be all that You want us to be so that others will see Jesus in our acts of service and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be drawn to faith in You, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. In Jesus' saving name we pray. Amen.

Hand out copies of the LWML Pledge and say it together.

Sing: "May We Thy Precepts, Lord, Fulfill," LSB 698, TLH 412, LW 389.

God's True Desire for His Children
Written by Patricia Willoughby, Georgetown, Texas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



God's True Desire for His Children

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: copies of this study for attendees, Bibles, copies of the LWML Pledge (found in the last section of *reSOURCES*), and hymnals]

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Opening Prayer: Lord God, send Your Holy Spirit to work in us so that we might better understand who we are in You and how we might better reflect You as we serve others through Your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Who We Were

Read Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12, and Ephesians 2:1–3. Based on these verses, describe what you were like before faith in Jesus. We are born sinful. We faced eternal death because of sin. We were dead in [our] trespasses and sins, we lived in the passions of our flesh ... and were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1–3).

Separated from God by both the sin we inherit and by the sins we commit, we are in need of rescue. Without faith in Jesus, we are God's enemies who justly deserve eternal suffering and death.

Read John 3:16. Why did God rescue us? God rescued us because of His great love for us.

How did He do so? See also 1 Peter 2:24. God rescued us through the suffering and death of His Son, Jesus. Jesus bore our sins on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for having rescued us from eternal death through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Whose We Are Now

Jesus died so that we "might live with Him and for Him in peace and joy, now and forever" (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH ©2017, Question 176, p. 189).

Through the faith given to us through God's Word and the water of Holy Baptism, we no longer belong to the world and to our sinful flesh. Instead, we are united with Christ by faith. Jesus is ours and we are His.

What do each of the following verses say concerning what it means to belong to Jesus?

Romans 14:8: No matter what, we are the Lord's.

Galatians 2:20: Jesus lives in us and we live by faith in Him.

Titus 2:14: Jesus has redeemed us from sin. He has purified us. We belong to Him. He gives us the desire to do good things to glorify Him.

1 Peter 2:9: We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

God desires that as His children we live by faith for Him. By the power of the Holy Spirit as His redeemed people, we are to proclaim Him and to do good works in His name.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for making us Yours through faith in Jesus our Savior. As Your children, help us to live for You as we serve You and others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Serving As Jesus' Servants

As we remember that we belong to God, how does God desire us to be as we live for Him? How does knowing who He desires us to be empower us as we serve Him and others?

To begin thinking about how God desires us to be, read Ephesians 4:32 out loud with the others in your group. According to this verse, what are three things God desires us to be?

1. kind to one another,
2. tenderhearted,
3. forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

What does it mean to *be kind* to one another? To be kind means to be "loving, affectionate, sympathetic, friendly, and gentle" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary).

Why is being kind an important attribute? When we are kind to others, it shows that we care about them and that we love them. Kindness shows that we are concerned about a person's needs. The Holy Spirit works kindness in us and works through the kindness we show to draw people to Jesus, their best and kindest Friend.

Name some specific ways you can show kindness as you serve the Lord by serving others. Specific ways we can show kindness include greeting church visitors with friendly and welcoming comments, listening to and showing genuine interest in the needs of others, taking a meal to an individual following surgery, offering to sit in a pew with a young mother to help out with her little ones, giving a smile and a hug (if appropriate) to brighten the day of another person.

Prayer: Lord God, daily You show amazing kindness to us as You love and forgive us. May You work in us so that we daily show this same kindness to all. Amen.

God also desires us to be *tenderhearted*. What does this mean? To be *tenderhearted* means to show compassion, care, and concern for another person.

Another word for tenderhearted is compassionate. Compassion can be defined as “two hearts pulling at one load.” How is Jesus the perfect example of being tenderhearted? (See also Matthew 11:28.) As true God, Jesus immediately knows all our needs. His love for us knows no end. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus tenderly invites us to lay our burdens on Him. We can trust that He can help us with our every need because He took care of our greatest need: our need to be rescued from sin. On the cross, He bore our sins upon Himself and He powerfully defeated sin, death, and the devil when He rose from the dead.

What special element does being tenderhearted bring to the serving opportunities God places before us? Our sinful nature and the callousness of the world can make our hearts hard and blind us to the needs of others. God works in us to make our hearts tender and receptive to the needs of others. God touches our hearts so that we are genuinely concerned and interested in serving others. He gives us the strength and the wisdom to help those in need and to show them the love and tenderheartedness He has for them. This is the same tenderness He daily shows to us when He loves and forgives us.

Prayer: Lord God, inspire our hearts to be tenderhearted towards all with whom we come in contact today, just as You are tenderhearted to us. Amen.

Read Colossians 3:13. When we *bear(ing) with one another*, we understand the struggles of others because of our own struggles with temptation and sin (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH ©2009, study note for Colossians 3:13, p. 2047). How does having such an understanding help us serve others? We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Not one of us is perfect. We all need Jesus. The Holy Spirit leads us to recognize this. “Forgiving others shows that we truly believe God has forgiven us” (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH ©2009, study note for Colossians 3:13, p. 2047).

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins so that we might be forgiven. Help us to forgive others as You forgive us. Amen.

Read Ephesians 5:1–2. According to verse 1, how does God desire us to be? Be *imitators of God, as beloved children*.

According to verse 2, in what specific way does God want us to imitate Him? God desires that we walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

Why is sacrificial love at the heart of serving God? Out of gratitude for all that God has done and continues to do for us, especially Christ’s sacrifice of His life to save us from our sins, we give ourselves in service to Him.

What can make sacrificial service in love so difficult? Sacrificial service in love requires that we give up something when we serve. Our selfish natures tell us not to give away our time, our skills, or our riches. Through faith, as we recognize the painful choice Jesus made to give His life to save ours, the Holy Spirit works gratitude in our hearts and leads us to show that gratitude in loving service. We are motivated by Jesus’ own example to set aside our own needs and to put the needs of others first.

Read Ephesians 4:24. How is it possible for us to serve others in the way that Jesus serves us? In Holy Baptism, God recreates us. He gives us faith in Him and a new eternal life. In faith, we look to Jesus and His strength so that we may serve others in the way that He serves us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Your life to save ours. Please work Your sacrificial love in our hearts so that we may imitate You by unselfishly serving others. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Read Ephesians 5:18b-21. With Whom are we to be filled? We are to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

How is this possible? When we are baptized, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts and gives us faith in the Triune God.

What is possible when the Holy Spirit works in us? The Holy Spirit leads us, together with other believers, to worship God with *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* (v. 19). He leads us to thank Him for all that He has done and continues to do in our lives. He leads us to submit to one another (v. 21).

Name some specific situations where you can serve others with *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* (v. 19). God leads us to share His Word with one another as we speak His Word to one another and as we sing hymns based on the truths found in His Word. God's Word comforts, uplifts, strengthens, and gives life. God leads us to share His Word in worship, in Bible study, and in everyday life.

What does it mean to submit to another person? To submit to someone means to put aside our own interests and to put that individual's needs first.

Read Philippians 2:3–8. Jesus set aside the glory of heaven to submit to His Father's will when He came to earth to serve us and to save us. How does knowing this help us to look to the needs of others as Jesus' servants today? Jesus was the perfect humble servant. He willingly died to save all people from sin. He gave up everything for us. The Holy Spirit works humility in us so that we can set aside our own desires and agendas and instead submit to God's will for us. When we read His Word and partake of the Lord's Supper, we receive the strength and will to do the work that God desires us to do.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, You set aside Your glory to come to earth to humbly serve and to give Your life for us. Fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we may submit to Your will and submit to the needs of others. Put Your Word and Your song in our hearts so that we may serve others with the joy that comes from trusting You. Amen.

Read Colossians 3:15–17. While these verses are similar to those you previously read from Ephesians 5, some additional elements for serving others through love are added. What are we to let rule our hearts (v. 15)? We are to let the peace of Christ rule our hearts.

How does God desire us to be? God desires us to be thankful.

What is to *dwell in us richly* (v. 16)? The word of Christ is to dwell in us richly.

How are we to *do everything* (v. 17)? We are to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

How might knowing that this is what God desires change the way in which you currently serve Him? Encourage participants to share their thoughts. As the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God

that we hear and read, instead of serving half-heartedly or grudgingly, we are enabled to serve God thankfully. Through faith, we can serve with peaceful hearts assured that we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, give us the desire to be of the same mind and having the same love so that others will want to know You. Replace our grumbling and complaining with an attitude of gratitude. Let us not be anxious but come to You in prayer with all our needs as You work in us so that we might peacefully and confidently serve others through Your love. Amen.

Read Romans 12:2. God desires that we *do not be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of your mind*. When does God begin this transformation process in us? God's transformation of us begins when we are baptized.

When we study God's Word, the Holy Spirit works in us to transform our thinking so that we will no longer be conformed to our own passions or to this world. How is this evident in your own life? Encourage participants to share truths from the Bible that have transformed their thinking.

How does the transformation God is working in you allow you to be a servant for Him? It is only through this transformation that we can truly serve God with all that we are and have.

In a sentence or two, describe what God's true desire is for you as His child? As participants formulate their statements, encourage them to look back at the "be" verses they've examined in this study to review God's desires for them.

Read Luke 1:37 and Philippians 4:13. What comfort and strength do these verses give you as serve others as Jesus' servants? Holy Scripture reminds us that nothing is impossible for God and that through His strength, we can follow His will and do His work.

Closing Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, in Your Word you tell us what Your true desire is for us. Help us, gracious Lord, to be all that You want us to be so that others will see Jesus in our acts of service and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be drawn to faith in You, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. In Jesus' saving name we pray. Amen.

Hand out copies of the LWML Pledge and say it together.

Sing: "May We Thy Precepts, Lord, Fulfill," LSB 698, TLH 412, LW 389.

God's True Desire for His Children
Leader's Guide
Written by Patricia Willoughby, Georgetown, Texas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



On Solid Ground: Living and Sharing Jesus' Easter Victory

Devotion

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Since this is a devotion on Christ's Easter victory, it is only fitting that we begin with some of the greatest words we will ever share: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

I grew up in cattle country. Since becoming a pastor, I have been blessed to help various ranchers work their cattle. I've also spent a fair amount of time in the staging areas of rodeos. I share this because anyone who has ever been around cattle knows how important it is to pay attention to where you place your feet! Sometimes you can't help but step in a mess, but it is never the desire as it is not the most secure of footing.

Good spiritual footing is also important for our witness to the victory we've been given over death and the grave. With everything around us pointing us in the way of death, including our own bodies and minds, it is vital we know without a doubt that we stand on solid ground where God's promise is concerned!

In the popular animated movie, "Aladdin", there are a couple of instances where Aladdin asks Princess Jasmine a very important question. The first time he asked was during a rather harrowing escape from the marketplace. At this point Aladdin had no idea who Jasmine was. But the second time he knew as he began to woo her and sought to convince her to join him on his magic carpet. The question he asked was: "Do you trust me?" In both instances she does and, the rest, as they say, is history.

Unlike Aladdin, God does not ask us to trust in Him—He commands it! Holy Scripture contains many passages that speak to us concerning the trust God would have us live and show! For example, we read:

- *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).*
- [Jesus said,] *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1).*
- *Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act (Psalm 37:5).*

These are but three of those passages. You, no doubt, can add many more. Regardless, we are commanded to trust in Him who has loved us so. We are to trust in Him without doubt or question because He is the God of all creation! He is the God of Redemption! He is the God who lights our path and enables us to rejoice! He is the God who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light for the express purpose of proclaiming His *excellencies* (1 Peter 2:9). He is the one and only true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

When you read 1 Corinthians 15 (our devotion verse is the second to last verse of the chapter), you will not encounter the Lord, through Paul, making a case trying to get people to believe his Word. Instead, he writes about WHY we who have been given the promise ARE to believe in

what God has given us; wrapping up the chapter with his powerful declaration of Jesus' victory over death and the grave. Thankfully, this victory is given to us without any cost to us as all the "heavy lifting" has been done by Jesus. We, therefore, with Paul, are moved to exclaim: *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

As the Holy Spirit leads us through Word and Sacrament to know the truth of God's Word and to know we stand on solid ground through faith in Him, He enables us to better live out this truth. There is no grand formula to be shared. It's simply that we trust in the Word and promise of God to be exactly what it says it is: a life-giving Word and promise. Knowing His Word well also means we know that we live in a fallen world. It means we know that we inhabit sinful flesh which means that life isn't always going to be pleasant or easy. The Lord might allow or even send a bit of ugliness to touch our lives for the very purpose of strengthening our faith – consider the books of Judges and Job. Such times needn't rob us of our faith, but enable us to say all the more: *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* For we know that in Jesus, all has been overcome!

How different the cartoon story of Aladdin would have been if Jasmine had said, "No, thank you," to Aladdin and walked away. In a much greater way, how different is the story of a life touched by Jesus! How incredible the joy of knowing God's forgiveness and the promise of life without end! That is the joy that is ours to share as we live out the faith God has given us! We know we stand on solid ground – ground made solid BECAUSE of the victory we have been given in Jesus our Lord!

Prayer: Gracious Father in heaven, thank You for the precious gift of life given us by Your love. We especially give You thanks for the gift of life without end, given us in the victory won for us by Jesus. Bless us to be the blessings You have called us to be. By the power of the Holy Spirit, help us to not only speak words of faith when it is safe or convenient, but to live our faith for all to see as You lead us where You will. To You be all praise, honor, and glory! This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

From Good to Better to Best
Written by the Rev. Don White, Stuttgart, Arkansas
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



From Good to Better to Best Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles, copies of this Bible study for attendees]

In this Bible study we will focus on Jesus' resurrection and on the importance of living and sharing Jesus' Easter victory based on the theme verse 1 Corinthians 15:57: *But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Opening Prayer: Dear Holy Trinity, We praise You and thank You for Jesus' resurrection which gives us the victory over sin, death, and the devil. Thank You for giving us the desire and privilege to live and share the Easter victory in our daily lives. Please guide us through this Bible study and help us gain a greater understanding and appreciation of Jesus' death and resurrection. In the Name of Jesus, our risen Savior. Amen.

Good

Before Jesus could rise on Easter morning, He had to suffer and die on the cross on what has come to be known as GOOD Friday. The suffering and death Jesus endured was certainly not "good" for Him. But it is certainly good for us. Read the following Bible passages and describe the good things that came out of this tragic event.

Luke 23:33–34: _____

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Luke 23:39–43: _____

Matthew 27:54 and Luke 23:47: _____

John 19:28–30 (also refer to Matthew 5:17.): _____

John 19:35: _____

Galatians 3:10, 13–14: _____

Romans 5:8–10: _____

Hebrews 2:14–15: _____

Better

Jesus' resurrection from the dead on Easter morning was certainly BETTER than the gruesome torture of His crucifixion on GOOD Friday. Imagine how much BETTER the followers of Jesus felt when they learned that He was alive! Work together as a group and fill in the blanks below with the following words: cross, grave, victories, resurrection, accomplished, risen, worthless

Although Jesus _____ many _____ on the _____, they would have been _____ if He had not _____ from the _____. In other words, you could say His _____ "sealed the deal!"

Read the following verses and explain how they support the previous statement as well as reinforce the significance that Jesus not only died but rose again.

Romans 10:9: _____

1 Corinthians 15:14, 17–22: _____

Reread 1 Corinthians 15:57 (this study's theme verse) found on page 1. The victory mentioned in this verse is "[the] victory over the condemnation for sin that the law brought and over death and the grave through the death and resurrection of Christ" (*Concordia NIV Self Study Bible*, ©1985, p.1770).

In the following Bible passages, identify what else is BETTER now, or what does a BETTER life consist of because of Jesus' resurrection?

1 Corinthians 15:58: (Keep in mind that this verse comes directly after the theme verse about the resurrection victory.) How does Jesus' resurrection impact our lives? _____

Colossians 2:12–14: _____

Colossians 3:1–2: _____

Colossians 3:12–17: _____

Read Romans 6:4–14. Walking in newness of life means our lives are now free from the guilt of sin (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, ©2009, study note on v. 4, p.1919). List three truths that state how our lives are BETTER because of Jesus' resurrection. _____

Read Romans 7:4–6. How is our service to God BETTER because of Jesus' resurrection? _____

Read Hebrews 13:20–21. In Hebrews 13:20, the author uses the phrase “eternal covenant.” That is the new and BETTER covenant ushered in by Jesus’ resurrection. His death marked the end of the old covenant primarily based on the Law. This new covenant is a covenant of grace—the undeserved gift of forgiveness and the assurance of salvation and eternal life in heaven to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus established a new and BETTER covenant with all who believe in Him.

Best

The BEST is yet to come for us because of Jesus’ death and resurrection!

Read Ephesians 2:1–8. Because of God’s grace, where will all believers sit someday? _____

Read John 14:1–4. What is Jesus doing for us? _____

Reread verse 3b. In this verse, what does Jesus promise all believers? _____

When Jesus returns to the world, some of the very BEST things will happen to those who believe in Him. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17 to find out more about Jesus’ second coming.

When Jesus returns, who will be raised first? _____

At the time of Jesus’ return, what will happen to the living? _____

What do each of these Bible passages say about the BEST victory that is still to come for those who trust in Jesus?

1 Peter 1:3–5: _____

Colossians 3:4: _____

Hebrews 9:28: _____

1 Corinthians 6:14: _____

John 6:40: _____

Sadly, not everyone will experience the BEST that Christians will in eternity. Jesus’ Second Coming will also be Judgment Day. The dead who are NOT in Christ will be raised but will spend eternity in hell as well as those still alive on the last day who do not know Christ—they will NOT meet the Lord in the air or live with Him in heaven.

The Easter message and the Gospel message are basically one and the same—that God loved us so much He sent His Son to die and rise again for our sins and that forgiveness and eternal life are free gifts to those who believe. In 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 Paul writes, *Now I would remind*

you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. The Easter and Gospel message are of *first importance*. By the power of the Holy Spirit, as we acknowledge the truths the Bible shares concerning Jesus' second coming, why is it so important that we share the Gospel message in every way possible? _____

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to make heaven a reality for us! Dear Jesus, thank You for obeying Your Father's will by dying for our sins and rising again to grant us salvation. Thank You for making heaven a reality for us! Dear Holy Spirit, thank You for walking with us daily as You work in us to spread the Good News and lead us to live and share Jesus' resurrection victory with everyone. Thank You, Holy Trinity, for victoriously leading us from the GOOD, to the BETTER, and finally to the BEST! In the Name of Jesus, our risen Savior. Amen.

From Good to Better to Best
Written by Patti Thies, Ankeny, Iowa
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



From Good to Better to Best

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles, copies of this Bible study for attendees]

In this Bible study we will focus on Jesus' resurrection and on the importance of living and sharing Jesus' Easter victory based on the theme verse 1 Corinthians 15:57: *But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Opening Prayer: Dear Holy Trinity, We praise You and thank You for Jesus' resurrection which gives us the victory over sin, death, and the devil. Thank You for giving us the desire and privilege to live and share the Easter victory in our daily lives. Please guide us through this Bible study and help us gain a greater understanding and appreciation of Jesus' death and resurrection. In the Name of Jesus, our risen Savior. Amen.

Good

Before Jesus could rise on Easter morning, He had to suffer and die on the cross on what has come to be known as GOOD Friday. The suffering and death Jesus endured was certainly not "good" for Him. But it is certainly good for us. Read the following Bible passages and describe the good things that came out of this tragic event.

Luke 23:33–34: Jesus asked God to forgive His enemies/murderers.

Luke 23:39–43: One of the criminals next to Jesus repented of his sins, was forgiven, and received the gift of eternal life.

Matthew 27:54 and Luke 23:47: The centurion and others with him finally believed that Jesus is God's Son. Luke 23:47 reveals that the centurion praised God and said that Jesus was innocent.

John 19:28–30 (also refer to Matthew 5:17.): Through His death, Jesus completely paid the price we owed God for our sins.

John 19:35: Those present at Jesus' death were able to bear witness to the account and share it with others so, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they might also believe and come to know Jesus.

Galatians 3:10, 13–14: Jesus became cursed for us when He took all our sins upon Himself on the cross. Jesus died for all people, even the Gentiles, who now, through faith, are made sons and daughters of Abraham.

Romans 5:8–10: Even though we are sinners, Christ loves us so much that He sacrificed His life for us. The shedding of Jesus' blood when He died on the cross justifies all sinners and saves us from God's wrath and the eternal punishment we deserve for our sins. Though we were once God's enemies, Jesus' death reconciles us to our heavenly Father.

Hebrews 2:14–15: Jesus' death on the cross is a victory over the devil. Jesus also delivered those in sin's bondage from the fear of eternal death.

Better

Jesus' resurrection from the dead on Easter morning was certainly BETTER than the gruesome torture of His crucifixion on GOOD Friday. Imagine how much BETTER the followers of Jesus felt when they learned that He was alive! Work together as a group and fill in the blanks below with the following words: cross, grave, victories, resurrection, accomplished, risen, worthless

Although Jesus accomplished many victories on the cross, they would have been worthless if He had not risen from the grave. In other words, you could say His resurrection "sealed the deal!"

Read the following verses and explain how they support the previous statement as well as reinforce the significance that Jesus not only died but rose again.

Romans 10:9: It is not enough to believe that Jesus died. We also believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we would not be saved. His resurrection is the proof that He has conquered sin, death, and the devil.

1 Corinthians 15:14, 17–22: Without Christ's resurrection, our faith is in vain and futile, and we would still be in our sins. Those who have died would have no hope of heaven.

Reread 1 Corinthians 15:57 (this study's theme verse) found on page 1. The victory mentioned in this verse is "(the) victory over the condemnation for sin that the law brought and over death and the grave through the death and resurrection of Christ" (*Concordia NIV Self Study Bible*, ©1985, p.1770).

In the following Bible passages, identify what else is BETTER now, or what does a BETTER life consist of because of Jesus' resurrection?

1 Corinthians 15:58: (Keep in mind that this verse comes directly after the theme verse about the resurrection victory.) How does Jesus' resurrection impact our lives? By the faith given us by the Holy Spirit, we trust that Christ is alive and has given us the victory over sin, death, and the devil. Because we are certain that Jesus lives forever, the Holy Spirit motivates us to stand firm, keep the faith, and serve Him.

Colossians 2:12–14: Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, all our sins (*debts*) have been cancelled in full. In Holy Baptism, we too are raised in faith and receive a new, eternal life.

Colossians 3:1–2: As we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit leads us to seek the things that are above and set our minds on them.

Colossians 3:12–17: As God's chosen people made holy in Jesus, He leads us to *put on ... compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience* (v. 12). As one body, He leads us to *forgive others and to love all*. Through the power of the Word, the Holy Spirit leads us to *teach and admonish each other in all wisdom, sing psalms, hymns, and other spiritual songs* (v.16). We are to *do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus* (v.17).

Read Romans 6:4–14. Walking in newness of life means our lives are now free from the guilt of sin (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, ©2009, study note on v. 4, p.1919). List three truths that state how our lives are BETTER because of Jesus' resurrection. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we are no longer enslaved to sin. We live with Jesus now through faith and will someday live with Him forever in heaven. We are dead to sin and alive to God.

Read Romans 7:4–6. How is our service to God BETTER because of Jesus' resurrection? Because of Jesus' resurrection, we now serve in the new way of the Spirit. Because we are now robed with Christ's righteousness, we serve with joy, rather than wondering if we've done enough.

Read Hebrews 13:20–21. In Hebrews 13:20, the author uses the phrase “eternal covenant.” That is the new and BETTER covenant ushered in by Jesus' resurrection. His death marked the end of the old covenant primarily based on the Law. This new covenant is a covenant of grace—the undeserved gift of forgiveness and the assurance of salvation and eternal life in heaven to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus established a new and BETTER covenant with all who believe in Him.

Best

The BEST is yet to come for us because of Jesus' death and resurrection!

Read Ephesians 2:1–8. Because of God's grace, where will all believers sit someday? All believers will sit with Jesus in heaven.

Read John 14:1–4. What is Jesus doing for us? Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven.

Reread verse 3b. In this verse, what does Jesus promise all believers? Jesus promises all believers that they will be where He is.

When Jesus returns to the world, some of the very BEST things will happen to those who believe in Him. Read 1Thessalonians 4:13–17 to find out more about Jesus' second coming.

When Jesus returns, who will be raised first? The dead in Christ will be raised first.

At the time of Jesus' return, what will happen to the living? The living will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so they will always be with the Lord.

What do each of these Bible passages say about the BEST victory that is still to come for those who trust in Jesus?

1 Peter 1:3–5: Through Jesus' resurrection and according to His great mercy, God caused us to be born again to a living hope – the hope of an eternal inheritance kept in heaven for us which is *imperishable, undefiled, and unfading* (v.4). God is keeping us in the true faith while we live on earth for a salvation to be revealed on the last day.

Colossians 3:4: Because of His resurrection, Christ is our life. He will never die again. And when he appears (on the last day/Second Coming) we will also appear with Him in glory.

Hebrews 9:28: There will be a Second Coming of Christ to save those eagerly waiting for Him. He will not have to come to bear our sins because He has already done that.

1 Corinthians 6:14: Because God raised the Lord, we, too, will be raised by God's power.

John 6:40: It is the Father's will that all believers in Jesus who look on Him should have eternal life and be raised on the last day by the Son.

Sadly, not everyone will experience the BEST that Christians will in eternity. Jesus' Second Coming will also be Judgment Day, and the dead who are NOT in Christ will be raised but will spend eternity in hell as well as those still alive on the last day who do not know Christ—they will NOT meet the Lord in the air and live with Him in heaven.

The Easter message and the Gospel message are basically one and the same—that God loved us so much He sent His Son to die and rise again for our sins and that forgiveness and eternal life are free gifts to those who believe. In 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 Paul writes, *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, ~~(and)~~ that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* The Easter and Gospel message are of *first importance*. By the power of the Holy Spirit, as we acknowledge the truths the Bible shares concerning Jesus' second coming, why is it so important that we share the Gospel message in every way possible? In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands us to share the truth of His death, resurrection, and saving love with all nations. God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). God works through us to tell others they are saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to make heaven a reality for us! Dear Jesus, thank You for obeying Your Father's will by dying for our sins and rising again to grant us salvation. Thank You for making heaven a reality for us! Dear Holy Spirit, thank You for walking with us daily as You work in us to spread the Good News and lead us to live and share Jesus' resurrection victory with everyone. Thank You, Holy Trinity, for victoriously leading us from the GOOD, to the BETTER, and finally to the BEST! In the Name of Jesus, our risen Savior. Amen.

From Good to Better to Best
Leader's Guide
Written by Patti Thies, Ankeny, Iowa
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Raising Children Who Love Jesus

Devotion

[Please provide: 5, 11-inch by 14-inch sheets of white poster board, black marker]

(Prior to presenting this devotion, please print the letters of the word “TRUST,” on separate sheets of poster board, one letter per sheet.)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Becoming a parent is a wonderful blessing and the start of a crazy journey filled with lots of twists and turns along the way. On every step along this path, God is with us. On this journey, because there are situations where both parents and children are faced with the unknown, parents are led by the Holy Spirit to trust in God and not on their own understanding. I know on my own journey, my biggest prayer is that my three children would love Jesus and follow Him. I’ve had to trust in God to help me show my children what it means to love and follow Him.

The word “TRUST” can serve as an acronym to remind us what the Bible says concerning raising kids who love Jesus.

(Hold up the poster board with the letter “T.”)

T – Teach your children who Jesus is. Jesus tells us, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6). From the time your child is baptized, the Holy Spirit promises to grow and nurture the faith relationship with the Triune God that He has established in your child. The Holy Spirit is your partner as you teach your children His Word. Read the Bible with them. Show them Jesus’ redeeming love and grace in every Bible account you read together. Pray with them. Give your children opportunities for other Christians to teach them, too. Having other Christian adults in their lives has been a huge blessing to me and to my children. I love that they have someone besides their parents whom they can go to and trust to tell them the truth and to guide them in God’s Word.

(Hold up the poster board with the letter “R.”)

R – Remind them that God forgives their sins for Jesus’ sake. As Peter preached, *To him, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name* (Acts 10:43). Our children are not perfect. Many times they will mess up and make poor decisions. They need to know there are consequences when they do. However, they also need to know they are forgiven. They need to know they have a forgiving Father in heaven who loves them very much. They also need to know that you forgive them and that you are there for them, no matter what.

(Hold up the poster board with the letter “U.”)

U – Understand that it's hard to raise Christian children. God's Word reminds us, *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4). Children need guidance and rules to follow. Parents are called by God to discipline their children when an action calls for it. For their own safety, sometimes we have to tell our children "no." None of this is easy. God our Father disciplines us when we need it. Proverbs 3:11–12 says, *My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.* When you sometimes feel like the "bad guy," remember that Christian discipline is an important way that we show our children we love them. Remember also that we get to reward our children. We get to celebrate with them in great moments in their lives. We get to teach them about Jesus. We get to love them unconditionally.

(Hold up the poster board with the letter "S.")

S - Show them Jesus. *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Ephesians 5:1–2). Children model what they see. If they see us reading the Bible, they will. If they see us being kind to the crabby lady at the checkout, they will be kind to their crabby classmate. If they see us volunteering in the community or at church, they may volunteer at school or help teach Sunday school. As our children learn to recognize and embrace the talents and gifts with which God has blessed them, we pray they will be led by the Holy Spirit to use them to serve Him and other people.

(Hold up the poster board with the second letter "T.")

T – Tell them Jesus loves them. *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (1 John 4:9–10). Assure your children that Jesus hears them when they pray. Tell them about the ways God has blessed you and continues to bless you. Encourage your children to recognize the ways God is blessing them and to thank Him for all His work in their lives. Regularly tell your children that you love them and that you are blessed that God chose you to be their parent.

Prayer: Dear God, raising children who love and trust in You is a challenge. We want our children to love You and to know that the only way to heaven is through faith in You. Please help us trust in You to guide all of our decisions, including those concerning parenting. Lead us to look to You and to Your strength as we carry out our vocation as parents. Thank You for the blessing of all the children in our lives. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we faithfully teach them of Your saving love found in Jesus alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Raising Children Who Love Jesus
Written by Anne Hartman, Eau Claire, Wisconsin
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Raising Christian Children Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this Bible study, Bibles, Lutheran Service Books (LSB)]

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, we thank You for blessing so many of our families with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Forgive us for the many ways we have fallen short in raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We ask that You bless our congregations with wisdom and understanding, to the end that our children would be diligent in the means of grace in all the chapters of life, and that they would suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from the Christian confession. In Jesus' strong name we pray. Amen.

A Beginning Discussion

If you are blessed with children, why did you choose for them the Godparents you chose? _____

If you have raised one or more children, list three life lessons you most wanted to impress upon them:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

If you could encourage young parents in three ways with regard to raising Christian children, what would your encouragements sound like?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The Confirmation Vow

Read through the Rite of Confirmation on pages 272–274 of the Lutheran Service Book (LSB). Then answer these questions:

What does it mean to acknowledge the gifts given by God in Holy Baptism? _____

What does it mean to renounce the devil and all his works and ways? _____

What does it mean to confess the First Person of the Trinity as “the Father?” _____

In these confirmation vows, the confirmand confesses his or her belief that God *is the maker of heaven and earth*. These are the same words he or she has confessed often in both The Apostles’ Creed and The Nicene Creed. Based on this confession of faith, what is the Christian’s proper response to theories of evolution regarding the beginning of the world? _____

How does catechetical instruction, both in the home and at church, help prepare individuals to defend their Christian faith in the world? _____

What does it mean to confess faith in Jesus Christ? _____

How would you summarize the work of the Holy Spirit? See also 1 Corinthians 12:3 and Ephesians 1:13. _____

How does catechetical instruction in your congregation in these days compare to your own in the “good old days?” _____

Searching The Scriptures

Read Matthew 28:16–20. What tools does Christ give us for making disciples of all nations? _____

As we set out to obey our Lord’s command (the Law), what is His Gospel promise? _____

Read Titus 3:1–8. How does Paul describe the human condition, apart from Christ?

What changes everything? _____

Why does God save us? _____

For what purposes does God save us? _____

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9. What promise is attached to the Fourth Commandment? See Deuteronomy 5:16. _____

What promise is attached to God's command for Israel to carefully keep the statutes and rules commanded by God? _____

What does it mean to have the commands of God on our hearts? _____

How do these verses serve as a warning to parents about entrusting Christian education to their pastors and Sunday school/day school teachers? _____

Read Psalm 22:27–31, 33:11, and 45:17.

What does it mean to proclaim God's *righteousness to a people yet unborn* (Psalm 22:31)? _____

How would you summarize the *plans of God's heart to all generations* (Psalm 33:11)? _____

Enabled by the Holy Spirit, name some specific ways that you can work within both your own family and your church family to help raise Christian children. _____

If you could have one wish for the next generations, what would it be? _____

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, we pray for Christian parents everywhere, that they would not exasperate their children, but bring them in the training and instruction of Your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray for parents, teachers, and pastors as they tell the next generations of Your wonderful deeds, that Your Name would be honored, Your cross would be lifted high, and Your Kingdom would come more and more among us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Raising Christian Children
Written by Pastor Larry Griffin, Janesville, MN
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Raising Christian Children

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[Please provide: copies of this Bible study, Bibles, Lutheran Service Books (LSB)]

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, we thank You for blessing so many of our families with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Forgive us for the many ways we have fallen short in raising them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We ask that You bless our congregations with wisdom and understanding, to the end that our children would be diligent in the means of grace in all the chapters of life, and that they would suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from the Christian confession. In Jesus' strong name we pray. Amen.

A Beginning Discussion

If you are blessed with children, why did you choose for them the Godparents you chose?
Encourage participants to share.

If you have raised one or more children, list three life lessons you most wanted to impress upon them:

1. Encourage participants to share and compare the similarities and differences in their responses.
2. _____
3. _____

If you could encourage young parents in three ways with regard to raising Christian children, what would your encouragements sound like?

1. As participants share their encouragements, help them as necessary to state them in Christ-centered, Gospel-sharing ways.
2. _____
3. _____

The Confirmation Vow

Read through the Rite of Confirmation on pages 272–274 of the Lutheran Service Book (LSB). Then answer these questions:

What does it mean to acknowledge the gifts given by God in Holy Baptism? It means to acknowledge God's gifts of the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation to all who believe. It is important to remember that when an individual is confirmed, he or she is publicly reaffirming the vows made for him or her (or by him or her if the child was older) at the time of baptism.

What does it mean to renounce the devil and all his works and ways? This means that we spend our days doing battle with all the enemies of our faith, by daily contrition and repentance.

What does it mean to confess the First Person of the Trinity as “the Father?” It means to confess that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and also our Father through faith in Christ. God is the Father of all people because He created them.

In these confirmation vows, the confirmand confesses his or her belief that God *is the maker of heaven and earth*. These are the same words he or she has confessed often in both The Apostles’ Creed and The Nicene Creed. Based on this confession of faith, what is the Christian’s proper response to theories of evolution regarding the beginning of the world? By faith, we believe what the Word of God teaches concerning creation. Evolutionary theories are not scientifically verifiable.

How does catechetical instruction, both in the home and at church, help prepare children to defend their Christian faith in the world? Catechetical instruction, given by both parents as well as pastors and teachers in the church, helps children learn to articulate what it means to believe in the Triune God. Such instruction gives children Bible truths to use to defend their faith against the claims of the world. Through catechetical instruction, as well as through all instruction in God’s true Word, the Holy Spirit works to equip people to share the truth of creation, the truth of how we get to heaven, and the truth of what God does and continues to do for us with those who do not know Jesus. Catechetical instruction is a very important next step after Holy Baptism, through which the Holy Spirit continues to build a life-long foundation of faith in an individual.

What does it mean to confess faith in Jesus Christ? When we confess faith in Jesus, we know and trust in Jesus as our only Savior from sin, death, and the devil, and believe that He gives us eternal life.

How would you summarize the work of the Holy Spirit? See also 1 Corinthians 12:3 and Ephesians 1:13. In the wide sense, sanctification is the whole work of the Spirit by which He brings us to faith and enables us to lead a godly life. In the narrow sense, He directs and empowers us to lead a godly life. As 1 Corinthians 12:3 states, *no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit*. In Holy Baptism, we are *sealed with the promised Holy Spirit* who gives us faith and keeps us in the one true faith (Ephesians 1:13).

How does catechetical instruction in your congregation in these days compare to your own in the “good old days?” Encourage participants to share some details concerning their confirmation instruction and how it has helped them to defend their faith throughout their lives.

Searching The Scriptures

Read Matthew 28:16–20. What tools does Christ give us for making disciples of all nations? Christ gives us Holy Baptism and His Word.

As we set out to obey our Lord’s command (the Law), what is His Gospel promise? Jesus’ Gospel promise is that He is with us always (Matthew 28:20).

Read Titus 3:1–8. How does Paul describe the human condition, apart from Christ? Titus 3:3 tells us that, apart from Christ, we are *foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another*. This is certainly a desperate condition.

What changes everything? The goodness and loving kindness of God appeared and that changes everything for us. Or to say it another way, the Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter messages which tell the story of Jesus' mission to save us from our sins.

Why does God save us? God saves us according to His mercy.

For what purposes does God save us? God saves us so that we might be careful to devote ourselves to good works. These works, of course, are not done for our salvation, but rather as a loving expression of thanks and praise to God for rescuing us from sin, eternal death, and the devil.

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–9. What promise is attached to the Fourth Commandment? See Deuteronomy 5:16. The promise is that our days might be long and that life would go well for us.

What promise is attached to God's command for Israel to carefully keep the statutes and rules commanded by God? God's promise to Israel was that their days would be long, their lives would go well, and they would multiply greatly.

What does it mean to have the commands of God on our hearts? It means that we always remember God's commands and that we inwardly treasure them.

How do these verses serve as a warning to parents about entrusting Christian education to their pastors and Sunday school/day school teachers? The Bible tells us that parents are their children's primary teachers. This privilege and duty is to be carried out in the rhythm of everyday living. Christian education at its best should always be a partnership between parents and the pastors and teachers in the church. God commands parents to actively teach the truths of His Word to their children. Instruction concerning the Triune God and the way to heaven starts in the home. Note also that Martin Luther wrote the Small Catechism is to be used as a teaching tool for parents.

Read Psalm 22:27–31, 33:11, and 45:17.

What does it mean to proclaim God's *righteousness to a people yet unborn*? Most wonderfully it is taught in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

How would you summarize the *plans of God's heart to all generations* (Psalm 33:11)? God's plan is the salvation of our souls, by grace and through faith in Jesus Christ.

Enabled by the Holy Spirit, name some specific ways that you can work within both your own family and your church family to help raise Christian children. Answers include daily Bible reading and devotions with your children at home, encouraging your children to memorize Scripture and to do it along with them, guiding and encouraging your children to complete midweek school and confirmation class lessons, regular attendance at worship, Sunday school, and Bible class, volunteering to teach a Sunday school or Vacation Bible School class, encouraging your adult children to do all of the above, praying for truthful teaching of God's Word in the home and in the church.

If you could have one wish for the next generations, what would it be? Answers will vary. Hopefully it will be that all know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, we pray for Christian parents everywhere, that they would not exasperate their children, but bring them in the training and instruction of Your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray for parents, teachers, and pastors as they tell the next generations of Your

wonderful deeds, that Your Name would be honored, Your cross would be lifted high, and Your Kingdom would come more and more among us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Raising Christian Children
Leader's Guide

Written by Pastor Larry Griffin, Janesville, MN

Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Women At Work For The Lord Devotion

So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. (Ecclesiastes 3: 22a).

Sing: "Take My Life and Let it Be," verses 1, 5, and 6. LSB 784, TLH 400, LW 404

I always knew I wanted to be a nurse, plain and simple. From the time I accompanied my mother to the doctor's office where she received her allergy shots, I was thrilled with the prospect of being a nurse. From the ripe old age of four years, I loved the smell of the alcohol and everything connected with it.

So it was definitely no surprise when I chose that profession, anxious to serve with other women on a daily basis. My nursing school consisted of all females. My best friends were my nursing classmates. We were in each other's weddings. When it came time to graduate and go to work, I worked with nearly all females. We were required to go to chapel three times a week, and that meant getting up 30 minutes early to attend a 20-minute chapel service where we listened to God's Word and sang His praises. We did all this before breakfast and our workday, which began at 6:45 a.m. Through all this, God was setting in place the path of my life.

You won't be surprised when I assure you that I was quietly schooled during all those formative years of working with women. I became comfortable with all the quirks and blessings of various females, and soon learned how to manage, lead, and set the pace with my female counterparts! I loved to go to work, and did so on at least a part-time basis for all my working years. It was a way to help support my husband-farmer, and helped to pay the bills.

God worked through my years of nursing to prepare me for the privilege and responsibilities of working with the women of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. Only now I had over 250,000 women to lead, work with, and enjoy! What a blessing all those formative years were for this experience in my life.

During the years of being your president, I continued to work within the nursing profession, at least on a part-time basis. It was a wonderful way to witness, grow, and allow my mind to think of something else other than LWML! It was necessary for keeping my head on straight. God continued to use my work in the nursing profession to help me relate to all our working women within the organization. Yes, once in a while, my involvement in LWML would pose a problem in my workplace, but 99% of the time, it was a blessing. No one ever questioned why I had a Mite Box on my desk or a nativity scene front and center during Advent.

Whatever your chosen profession is, enjoy the privilege. Do it to the best of your ability. Seek to be the best, and always *serve the Lord with gladness!* (Psalm 100:2a)

Prayer: Dear Lord, bless all the women of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. Be with them as they serve You both through the LWML and in their professions. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Women At Work For The Lord
Written by Past LWML President Virginia Von Seggern, Orchard, NE
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Sharing Our Gifts As We Work for the Lord

Bible Study

[Please provide: Bibles, hymnals, copies of this Bible study]

Opening Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank You for each and every woman with us to study Your Word, as well as for the opportunity to develop and nurture our relationships with one another. Open our hearts and minds to learn more about You and Your Will for our lives. Help us to focus on the truths found in Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Share with your group something about the kind of work and a bit about the different roles you have in your life. Do you ever ask yourself these questions: "What on earth am I here for?" "Am I doing what God wants me to do?" "Why do I have to work?" "Why am I sometimes overwhelmed?" In the business of our earthly lives, we often find ourselves with these questions and others related to our day-to-day responsibilities.

Sing: "Take My Life and Let It Be," LSB 783, TLH 400, LB 404

What phrases or verses of this hymn speak to you? _____

What do the lyrics of the hymn say concerning how we are to use our skills and talents in our work both inside and outside our homes? _____

Read Exodus 35:4–29. What were God's people commanded to do (vv.4–10)? _____

Reread verse 21. What motivated God's people to be generous in their giving? _____

What special work did the women do? See verses 25–26. _____

Read Exodus 35:31–35. How did Bezalel work for the Lord as the tabernacle was built?

Who motivated Bezalel to work as he did? _____

What truths concerning how we are to work can you glean from Bezalel's example as well as from the women who worked in the tabernacle? _____

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 and Ephesians 2:10. How has God specially equipped us to work for Him? _____

God knows us very intimately and has designed each one of us uniquely (Psalm 139:13). Each of us is designed or wired differently. That uniqueness sets us apart to serve God in many different ways. We are designed by God Himself to do His work. We are His masterpieces. He created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago. We are all baptized into one body but it is a body made up of many members – each one unique with a special purpose (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).

God works through the different skills, abilities, and talents with which He has blessed us to do the work of His kingdom here on earth. Think about the skills, talents, and abilities given to the women in your LWML society. How has God used these in the work that you do for Him?

What The Bible Says About Work

Read Genesis 2:15. What work did God give Adam to do in the garden of Eden? _____

How was Adam's original occupation different from any work he would ever do outside of Eden?

What does this say concerning the reason God gives us work to do? _____

The work God gives us to do is a gift from Him. Read the following Bible passages. What does each one say concerning how we are to work for Him?

Proverbs 10:4: _____

Ecclesiastes 5:18: _____

Romans 12:11: _____

1 Corinthians 15:58: _____

Colossians 3:23: _____

Titus 3:14: _____

How does your current attitude about your work reflect the work attitude that God desires us to have? _____

Seeking God's Will In Our Work

Read Matthew 25:14–28. What led the third servant to hide the talent his master gave him?

In terms of our own work, what can lead us to be like the third servant in Jesus' parable?

When we repent for our disobedience for not using what God has given us to serve Him and to bring Him glory, what does He promise us? See 1 John 1:9. _____

When our work is difficult and burdensome, what truths from the following Bible passages can help us to work joyfully for the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Deuteronomy 31:6–8: _____

1 Chronicles 16:11: _____

Psalms 32:8: _____

Proverbs 3:5: _____

Jeremiah 29:11: _____

Mark 10:42–45: _____

1 Peter 4:10: _____

Our Pledge Of Service To God

Speak together these words of the LWML Pledge:

In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption, we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him.

How do the words of this pledge remind us of the reason for all of the work we do? _____

The LWML theme Bible verse is *Serve the LORD with gladness!* (Psalm 100:2) God gives each one of us a unique set of gifts, skills, abilities, and talents. God is our Father who loves us. As we respond to God's mercy and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve Him and others. Through His Word and Sacraments, He strengthens us to work for Him. He blesses us to be blessings to others and to be lights of His saving love.

Sing: "Lord of All Good," LSB 786

Closing Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, You have shown us in Your Word how wonderfully we are designed, the work we are to do, and the light we are to be to the rest of the world. Guide us in discovering our talents, skills, and abilities and the direction You want us to take no matter what season of our life in which we may be. Help us to trust You and to show others Jesus in meaningful ways, even in the little things in life. In Your precious Name we pray. Amen.

Sharing Our Gifts as We Work for the Lord
Written by Karla Koehler, Wausa, Nebraska
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



Sharing our Gifts as We Work for the Lord

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: Bibles, hymnals, copies of this Bible study]

Opening Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank You for each and every woman with us to study Your Word, as well as for the opportunity to develop and nurture our relationships with one another. Open our hearts and minds to learn more about You and Your Will for our lives. Help us to focus on the truths found in Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Share with your group something about the kind of work and a bit about the different roles you have in your life. Do you ever ask yourself these questions: "What on earth am I here for?" "Am I doing what God wants me to do?" "Why do I have to work?" "Why am I sometimes overwhelmed?" In the business of our earthly lives, we often find ourselves with these questions and others related to our day-to-day responsibilities.

Sing: "Take My Life and Let It Be," LSB 783, TLH 400, LB 404

What phrases or verses of this hymn speak to you? Encourage participants to share. Focus on the hymn's theme that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we give God all that He has blessed us with so that we may serve Him.

What do the lyrics of the hymn say concerning how we are to use our skills and talents in our work both inside and outside our homes? All we do is to praise and honor God.

Read Exodus 35:4–29. What were God's people commanded to do (vv.4–10)? They were commanded to contribute their time, talents, and treasure generously to build the tabernacle.

Reread verse 21. What motivated God's people to be generous in their giving? God's Word caused the people to be generous.

What special work did the women do? See verses 25–26. The women used God-given skills to spin the fabrics for the tabernacle, including those made from goat's hair.

Read Exodus 35:31–35. How did Bezalel work for the Lord as the tabernacle was built? Bezalel used the intelligence, knowledge, and craftsmanship with which God blessed him to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood (vv.32–33). Bezalel was also to teach others to do this kind of work (v. 34).

Who motivated Bezalel to work as he did? The Spirit of God (v. 31) motivated him.

What truths concerning how we are to work can you glean from Bezalel's example as well as from the women who worked in the tabernacle? We, too, filled with the Holy Spirit, are to use our knowledge, intelligence, skills, and talents to work for God.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 and Ephesians 2:10. How has God specially equipped us to work for Him? The Holy Spirit has given us different gifts and different ways to work and serve, but all are for the same God (1 Corinthians 12:4–6). We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

God knows us very intimately and has designed each one of us uniquely (Psalm 139:13). Each of us is designed or wired differently. That uniqueness sets us apart to serve God in many different ways. We are designed by God Himself to do His work. We are His masterpiece. He created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago. We are all baptized into one body but it is a body made up of many members – each one unique with a special purpose (1 Corinthians 12:12–13).

God works through the different skills, abilities, and talents with which He has blessed us to do the work of His kingdom here on earth. Think about the skills, talents, and abilities given to the women in your LWML society. How has God used these in the work that you do for Him? Lead participants to cite specific examples of ways the women in their society have used their talents, skills, and abilities to work for God (e.g., teaching, banner making, flower arranging, food preparation, organizing events, visiting homebound members).

What The Bible Says About Work

Read Genesis 2:15. What work did God give Adam to do in the garden of Eden? God put Adam in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

How was Adam's original occupation different from any work he would ever do outside of Eden? Before his fall into sin, Adam's work was perfect and joyful. It was never boring or toilsome.

What does this say concerning the reason God gives us work to do? God gives us work so that we can care for His creation, including the people in it. God did not originally intend work to be something to dread.

The work God gives us to do is a gift from Him. Read the following Bible passages. What does each one say concerning how we are to work for Him?

Proverbs 10:4: God blesses those who work diligently.

Ecclesiastes 5:18: It is good and fitting ... to find enjoyment in the work God gives us to do.

Romans 12:11: God desires that we work fervently to serve Him.

1 Corinthians 15:58: We are to continually work for the Lord. We can be certain that our work for God is not worthless.

Colossians 3:23: God wants us to work hard for Him.

Titus 3:14: We are to devote ourselves to good works, help others in need, and be fruitful.

How does your current attitude about your work reflect the work attitude that God desires us to have? Allow participants some time to reflect on their current work attitudes. Because of infiltration of sin into all that we do, we can sometimes have an attitude of resentment towards work, as well as fall into habits of laziness, boredom, and inefficiency as we lose sight of our Lord, for Whom we work.

Seeking God's Will In Our Work

Read Matthew 25:14–28. What led the third servant to hide the talent his master gave him? He called his master, *hard* (v. 24), which could mean “cruel”, “demanding,” or even “violent”. He tried to blame his own failings on his master. (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, CPH, © 2009, study note on v.24, page 1639).

In terms of our own work, what can lead us to be like the third servant in Jesus' parable? Things like fear of failing, being fired, a demanding or harsh employer, or our own indifference are a few of the things that can lead us to be like the third servant.

When we repent for our disobedience for not using what God has given us to serve Him and to bring Him glory, what does He promise us? See 1 John 1:9. God promises to forgive our sins for Jesus' sake.

When our work is difficult and burdensome, what truths from the following Bible passages can help us to work joyfully for the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Deuteronomy 31:6–8: God promises to be with us always. It is in Him that we have our strength.

1 Chronicles 16:11: God desires that we continually seek Him and His strength.

Psalms 32:8: God promises to teach and counsel us.

Proverbs 3:5: God desires that we trust in Him and not in ourselves.

Jeremiah 29:11: God has only good plans for us. God's best plan for us is the eternal life that we receive through faith in Christ Jesus.

Mark 10:42–45: Jesus came to serve and to save all people. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to follow His example as we serve others through our work.

1 Peter 4:10: God has given each one of us gifts from His great variety of spiritual gifts. He commands that we use them to *serve one another*.

Our Pledge Of Service To God

Speak together these words of the LWML Pledge:

In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption, we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him.

How do the words of this pledge remind us of the reason for all of the work we do? We work for God in gratitude for the supreme sacrifice Jesus made for us when He died on the cross and rose again to save us from sin, death, and the devil. We give to our Savior all that we have in service to Him.

The LWML theme Bible verse is *serve the LORD with gladness!* (Psalm 100:2) God gives each one of us a unique set of gifts, skills, abilities, and talents. God is our Father who loves us. As we respond to God's mercy and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve Him and others. Through His Word and Sacraments, He strengthens us to work for Him. He blesses us to be blessings to others and to be lights of His saving love.

Sing: "Lord of All Good," LSB 786

Closing Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, You have shown us in Your Word how wonderfully we are designed, the work we are to do, and the light we are to be to the rest of the world. Guide us in discovering our talents, skills, and abilities and the direction You want us to take no matter what season of our life in which we may be. Help us to trust You and to show others Jesus in meaningful ways, even in the little things in life. In Your precious Name we pray. Amen.

Sharing Our Gifts as We Work for the Lord
Leader's Guide
Written by Karla Koehler, Wausa, Nebraska
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



God's Goodness Devotion

[Please provide: paper and pencil to complete the charting activity contained in the devotion]

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today (Genesis 50:20).

There was certainly evil there, on that hill outside Jerusalem, so many years ago. There were evil intentions indeed. On that hill was Jesus, Savior, Love incarnate, with His arms stretched from nail to nail. Vigilant soldiers were stationed below the cross as they awaited Jesus' death. Enemies of Jesus were there, hatred seething, conquest knocking at their demented internals. Satan waited to inhale the nightmarish victory stench of Jesus' dead body that he could only hope for in his dreams.

A last breath inhaled and exasperated. A heart-broken mother Mary. Jesus' blood-encrusted, lifeless body. A morose silence. There was certainly evil there, on that hill outside Jerusalem, so many years ago.

God was also there, in the middle of it all! With God in the middle, evil bolted, boulders moved, angels perched, Roman guards collapsed, Marys and friends and followers arrived, the once-dead but now-resurrected and living-again Jesus thrived, and the forever transformed world awakened. Peer in closely and you'll see the wily foe snarling in completed defeat. What was meant as evil was used by God for good—for our eternal good!

While this Holy Week and Easter event was gloriously the greatest, it indubitably wasn't the first time God would bring a good outcome from evil intentions. The Bible tells us how this happened again and again in the life of Joseph.

"You meant evil against me," Joseph said as he confronted his brothers from his elevated position in Egypt. Joseph's brothers were evil. In a jealous fit they tossed him into a pit and then towed him out again only to market him off as an Egyptian slave. How could their death-lies about Joseph, "proven" by the coat of many colors that they had bloodied and presented to their father Jacob as false evidence, be anything but pure evil on their part?

Evil? Consider Joseph, illicitly indicted from Potiphar's house to a surly, slimy prison. Unremembered by former fellow cell residents after aiding them by revealing the gist of their dreams. Joseph seemed hemmed in with evil. Immersed in it. Evil was everywhere!

But there, in the midst of evil, Joseph's merciful and gracious God was also present, and where He enters in, well, you know what happens to evil! As St. Paul reminds us in Romans 8:28: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

From the pit of a prison, Joseph the dreamer is elevated to Pharaoh's palace. That's good! Joseph not only reminisces with his brothers, he is reunited with them, as God operates His

grace through a series of awe-raising reorienting events (Genesis 45–50). That’s also good! Joseph delivers his family from certain famine and harsh death in Canaan by summoning his brothers and father and their people and their stuff to the land of Goshen and to amazing prosperity and God-assured life. The brothers may have intended only evil against Joseph, but with God in the middle of the muddle, He meant it for good, which for Joseph and his clan, for thousands of people including us, through Jesus and His salvation of all, is very, very good!

Are there other outstanding instances of God transforming evil and disappointment and anger to good in God’s Word? Absolutely! The pages of the Bible archive the accounts of His mercy and love and deliverance just waiting for our discovery.

Does God get in the middle of anger and crippling disappointment and life-destroying evil yet today? Does God get in the messes and the muddles of our lives and the lives of our contemporaries as well?

To answer those queries, take a sheet of paper and chart it into three columns. Head the left-hand column, “Evil.” Head the middle column, “God.” Head the right-hand column, “Good.” Then fill in the areas as you answer these questions: What evils, reasons for anger or disappointment have you gone through or are you now facing? What intervention has God delivered or will soon use to deliver you from these evils? What good from God have you experienced by His grace or can you, in fulfillment of His promises, expect?

With His love and grace for us through Christ Jesus, we can be assured that from what others mean for evil, God can and does bring about good.

Closing Prayer: Saving God, we thank You that You promise to be with us always, in the middle and the muddle of our lives, even and especially when we are faced with evil and disappointment and anger. Rescue us, according to Your amazing promises and power proclaimed to us in Your Word. With so many before us and with us now whom You have liberated from the evil forces around us, we give You glory and honor and praise. We look forward with great anticipation to the day when finally You will release us and all believers from sin’s temporary grip to the glorious complete freedom and life Jesus won for us in heaven. In His Name, which sets us free, we pray. Amen.

God’s Goodness
Written by Rev. Larry A. Miller, East Helena, Montana
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



“Why, God?” Trusting in God’s Goodness in Times of Disappointment and Anger

Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study, Bibles, and hymnals for each participant]

Opening Prayer: Lord, please bless us as we look at this study. Help each of us to be open to all that Your Holy Spirit will provide for us individually and as a group. Amen.

Everyone has had times when she had to ask, “Why, God?” Something negative, disappointing or bitter happened and you really wanted to know why. How did you feel when you asked, “Why, God?” _____

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20). This dialogue between Joseph and his brothers took place after their father Jacob/Israel died. Let’s take a few minutes and look quickly at the life of Joseph for context.

Genesis 37:2–8	The jealousy of Joseph’s brothers.
Genesis 37:26–27	Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers.
Genesis 39:4–5	Joseph entrusted with everything by his master.
Genesis 39:16–20a	The trap of Potiphar’s wife.
Genesis 40:6–8	Joseph used by God to explain dreams.
Genesis 41:41–43	Joseph promoted to Pharaoh’s second in command.

At what points in Joseph’s timeline might he have asked, “Why, God?” _____

What good did God work out of Joseph’s troubles and disappointments? _____

Stuck In The Emotion

It is very common to experience times when you need to ask, “Why, God?” It happens to everyone when he or she is learning to develop the mind of Christ and to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:12–14, 16b. How does the Holy Spirit help us when we ask, “Why, God?” _____

For most Christians, “Why, God?” questions come while we are immature in Christ. These questions come when what we anticipate God will do doesn’t occur as expected. As we mature

in Christ, the “Why, God?” questions come in connection to extreme emotions of pain, sorrow, disappointment, anger, or frustration. Some brothers and sisters are able to regain their trust in the Lord quickly but some Christians become stuck. The emotion is so extreme that some Christians struggle to recognize the Holy Spirit ministering to their hearts and minds. These Christians haven’t lost their faith, but neither have they experienced the healing needed to fully trust God and His guidance in their lives. Some emotions and experiences can be compartmentalized but real spiritual healing can sometimes take months or even years.

So how does a Christian become “unstuck”? How is she able to completely trust God again, and rejoice in His love and guidance in her life?

Remembering What God Has Done in Your Life

The prescription in God’s Word is very simple but effective. God knows that when His children get lost, stuck, or disillusioned it is always because of one thing; we have forgotten! We have forgotten all the amazing things God has done. We have forgotten all our prayers that God has answered, His blessings, His forgiveness of our sins, His miracles, and His never ending love. So the solution is to stop and remember everything, who you were, who you have become and who God always is. In remembering what God has done on our behalf, we are confronted with a story that moves us to tears, to unlimited joy, and to thankfulness beyond our capacity to fully grasp, explain, or ever repay!

Read Matthew 27:45–46. What is happening as the “Why, God” question is asked in verse 46?

How can these verses bring you comfort at the times when you ask, “Why, God?” _____

From where has God brought you? Far too many Christians want to completely forget their sinful past filled with shameful behavior and attitudes. When we try to forget our pasts, sadly it is very easy to downplay or erase the powerful actions of God to save, bless, heal and make us into new creations.

Read Romans 5:6–10. How do these verses describe the life-changing power of God’s love and grace for us? _____

These verses are very powerful because they don’t allow us to consider ourselves to be anything without Jesus. These verses declare us to be sinners and enemies so that there is no room to be “nice”, “good” or better than our neighbors. Apart from God we are nothing and we owe Him everything.

Some people may feel uncomfortable thinking about who they were before Jesus made them new creations. However it is necessary to remember where you were so that you can appreciate where you are now. I have found that in moments of self-pity, and when I am overwhelmed with emotions, I am almost convinced that no one including God understands me. In these moments the Holy Spirit will have me encounter a person who shames me out of my emotional pity party. Share a time when the Holy Spirit brought you out of an emotional funk and reminded you how incredibly blessed you really are. _____

Paul gives an excellent explanation of what sin does in our lives when we try to live without Jesus' salvation. Read Romans 7:15–25a. In these verses, what does Paul acknowledge about himself? _____

What else does Paul say about himself in 1Timothy 1:15? _____

How are you similar to the Apostle Paul? _____

Paul's thinking is very necessary for all of us because when we are stuck in a strong emotion, it is easy to forget from where God has brought us and that He has been with us the entire journey. This truth that Moses told Joshua is true for us as well: "*Be strong and courageous . . . He [God] will not leave you or forsake you.*" (Deuteronomy 31:6)

During an emotional moment it is very normal to be caught up in the subjective, self-centered focus of the emotion. It is during this pain, disappointment, or sorrow that for a while everything is about you. A person may be overcome with the mindset that the situation is unfair or that God is indifferent to how he or she feels.

The emotion can cause us to negate God's mercy and to diminish the grace and salvation of Jesus and the strengthening guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, when through Word and Sacrament, we are reminded of all that God has done and continues to do for us, and when we repent of our sinful forgetfulness and self-centeredness, then we live in grace under the new covenant that depends completely upon Jesus and not anything within ourselves. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Unstuck: Trusting God's Goodness In Good And Bad Experiences

When a Christian remembers her past and God's blessings, she recognizes that she is the collection of her experiences in Christ, both good and bad. Then all of her experiences become opportunities to share God's love in Jesus. Regardless of her experiences, whether they were disappointing, sad, or even bitter, they all came with Jesus Christ at her side. Therefore they are experiences she can call upon when someone else is hurting, confused, or stuck, and believes that no one else could possibly understand.

Paul gives a good example of using a bad moment when he discusses that Israel's troubles and problems were used to open the gospel to Gentiles. *So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!* (Romans 11:11–12)

Read Philippians 1:12–14. How did God use Paul’s time of imprisonment to help spread the Gospel? _____

God enabled Joseph, Paul, and many others named in the Bible to share with others His love and salvation despite their suffering. Isn’t it amazing that in both good and bad experiences, God can enable us to share the Gospel and find purpose? Everything we experience as a Christian becomes a resource for witnessing, teaching, compassion, and understanding because we know that God was (and is) with us at every moment.

We started this study with memories of some raw emotions and some, “Why, God?” thoughts. Now we see that our experiences were not because we couldn’t trust God’s goodness but so that we might be witnesses and resources to others that God is ever-faithful!

The worst moment in my life was when my first wife suddenly died. I was in a fog for well over a year and was greatly troubled. As the Holy Spirit healed my sorrow, I was also led to realize that this pain and experience would allow me to love, share, and encourage people who earlier would have rightly thought, “You can’t appreciate the pain and sorrow I’m experiencing”! Now I can tell of Jesus’ love and better understand how that hurting person feels. Just as God uses me, He is able to use you because those bad, “Why, God?” experiences make you uniquely qualified to share His never-ending love and compassion with that person who is currently stuck in a fog and who is asking herself if she can trust God despite her pain, disappointment, and sorrow. God has blessed you to become a living witness to Him who is worthy of trust, love, and praise no matter what experiences life brings.

What painful life challenges have you experienced through which God has brought you to a greater understanding of the hurt and pain that others experience? _____

Closing

Read Psalm 136, a psalm of remembrance from your hymnals responsively and then close with the following prayer: Thank You, Lord, for all my experiences in life, both good and bad. You have been ever-loving and trustworthy. Help me never to forget Your blessings and from where You have brought me. Thank You for making me Your child through the faith in Jesus with which You have blessed me through Holy Baptism. I rejoice that with Your loving care and wisdom, who I am today can be a blessing to a sister or brother who asks, “Why, God”? Bless me this day and everyday to rejoice in Your grace, mercy, and salvation. This I ask in the name of Jesus, Your Son, my Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

“Why, God?” Trusting in God’s Goodness in Times of Disappointment and Anger
Written by: Rev. Dr. John F. Johnson, Washington, DC
Published by: Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



“Why, God?” Trusting in God’s Goodness in Times of Disappointment and Anger

Bible Study
Leader’s Guide

[Please provide: copies of this study, Bibles, and hymnals for each participant]

Opening Prayer: Lord, please bless us as we look at this study. Help each of us to be open to all that Your Holy Spirit will provide for us individually and as a group. Amen.

Everyone has had times when she had to ask, “Why, God? Something negative, disappointing or bitter happened and you really wanted to know why? How did you feel when you asked, “Why, God? As leader it is important that you do not allow anyone to share her feelings in detail. The question is asking participants to remember how they felt at a moment when they didn’t completely trust God. Expect answers of hurt, loss, sorrow, anger, rejection, etc. These are feelings from the past but for some it may not be the distant past.

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20). This dialogue between Joseph and his brothers took place after their father Jacob/Israel died. Let’s take a few minutes and look quickly at the life of Joseph for context.

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Genesis 41:41-43	Joseph promoted to Pharaoh’s second in command.

At what points in Joseph’s timeline might he have asked, “Why, God?” Joseph could have asked this question of God at any point in the timeline.

What good did God work out of Joseph’s troubles and disappointments? Many people were saved from death in the famine. The actions Joseph took while second in command to Pharaoh also led him to be reunited with his father and brothers.

Stuck In The Emotion

It is very common to experience times when you need to ask, “Why, God?” It happens to everyone when he or she is learning to develop the mind of Christ and to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:12–14, 16b. How does the Holy Spirit help us when we ask, “Why, God?” The Holy Spirit helps us to understand God’s truths and His actions in our lives. While this understanding may not be complete, it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can even begin to understand God’s grace for us.

For most Christians, “Why, God?” questions come while we are immature in Christ. These questions come when what we anticipate God will do doesn’t occur as expected. As we mature in Christ, the “Why, God?” questions come in connection to extreme emotions of pain, sorrow, disappointment, anger or frustration. Some brothers and sisters are able to regain their trust in the Lord quickly but some Christians become stuck. The emotion is so extreme that some Christians struggle to recognize the Holy Spirit ministering to their hearts and minds. These Christians haven’t lost their faith, but neither have they experienced the healing needed to fully trust God and His guidance in their lives. Some emotions and experiences can be compartmentalized but real spiritual healing can sometimes take months or even years.

So how does a Christian become “unstuck”? How is she able to completely trust God again, and rejoice in His love and guidance in her life?

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Read Matthew 27:45–46. What is happening as the “Why, God” question is asked in verse 46? Jesus asks the “why” question as He suffers total abandonment from God, His Father. This is the ultimate point of Jesus’ suffering. He is completely alone as He suffers for all our sins and the sins of the world. Jesus suffered complete separation from God so that we will never have to face such terror. Jesus’ question is not asked because He doesn’t understand why such suffering was necessary. Instead, Jesus’ question expresses the horrific consequence that we would face for our sins without His sacrifice; that is, total separation from God for eternity.

How can these verses bring you comfort at the times when you ask, “Why, God?” At such times, we can remember that because Jesus suffered total abandonment on the cross when He suffered and died for our sins, God promises to never leave us or forsake us (Joshua 1:5b, Hebrews 13:5b). We can find comfort in knowing that Jesus understands our disappointments. We can find comfort in knowing that through His death and resurrection, Jesus overcame our every disappointment, pain, and sorrow to gain for us God’s forgiveness and the sure and certain hope of eternal life with Him through faith.

From where has God brought you? Far too many Christians want to completely forget their sinful past filled with shameful behavior and attitudes. When we try to forget our pasts, sadly it is very easy to downplay or erase the powerful actions of God to save, bless, heal and make us into new creations.

Read Romans 5:6–10. How do these verses describe the life changing power of God’s love and grace for us? Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are justified, saved from God’s wrath and eternal death, and we are reconciled to God.

These verses are very powerful because they don’t allow us to consider ourselves to be anything without Jesus. These verses declared us to be sinners and enemies so that there is no

room to be “nice”, “good” or better than our neighbors. Apart from God we are nothing and we owe Him everything.

Some people may feel uncomfortable thinking about who they were before Jesus made them new creations. However it is necessary to remember where you were so that you can appreciate where you are now. I have found that in moments of self-pity and when I am overwhelmed with emotions that I am almost convinced that no one including God understands me. In these moments the Holy Spirit will have me encounter a person who shames me out of my emotional pity party. Share a time when the Holy Spirit brought you out of an emotional funk and reminded you how incredibly blessed you really are? The participants can take several minutes to share these experiences because this sharing is part of the remembering process. There are no perfect answers but all should focus on being removed from self-pity or a stupor by being reminded that they are beloved and blessed by God.

Paul gives an excellent explanation of what sin does in our lives when we try to live without Jesus’ salvation. Read Romans 7:15–25a. In these verses, what does Paul acknowledge about himself? Paul acknowledges that despite will power and pharisaic perfectionism he can’t fulfill his good desires for God in and of himself. Paul was a Pharisee. Pharisees sought perfection in outward behavior and in Scriptural memorization. Paul realized that none of his effort was enough to be who God wanted him to be. Paul acknowledges that no one has hope except in the salvation of Jesus.

What else does Paul say about himself in 1 Timothy 1:15? Paul takes it further when he acknowledges who he was by declaring himself the *foremost* sinner so that never would anything distort who he was apart from the salvation of Jesus Christ.

How are you similar to the Apostle Paul? All of us *sin[ned]* and *fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). It is only by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus that our sins are forgiven and that we receive eternal life.

Paul’s thinking is very necessary for all of us because when we are stuck in a strong emotion it is easy to forget from where God has brought us and that He has been with us the entire journey. This truth that Moses told Joshua is true for us as well, “*Be strong and courageous . . . He (God) will not leave you or forsake you.*” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

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opportunities to share God's love in Jesus. Regardless of her experiences, whether they were disappointing, sad, or even bitter, they all came with Jesus Christ at her side. Therefore they are experiences she can call upon when someone else is hurting, confused or stuck, and believes that no one else could possibly understand.

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Read Philippians 1:12–14. How did God use Paul's time of imprisonment to help spread the Gospel? While Paul was imprisoned, he shared the Gospel with the whole imperial guard and to all the rest (v. 13). Paul shared with everyone that his imprisonment was for Christ. Those brothers close to Paul saw how his imprisonment did not lessen his faith. This encouraged them to speak the Word boldly without fear (v. 14).

God enabled Joseph, Paul, and many others named in the Bible to share with others His love and salvation despite their suffering. Isn't it amazing that in both good and bad experiences, God can enable us to share the Gospel and find purpose? Everything we experience as a Christian becomes a resource for witnessing, teaching, compassion and understanding because we know that God was (and is) with us at every moment.

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What painful life challenges have you experienced through which God has brought you to a greater understanding of the hurt and pain that others experience? Encourage participants to share.

Closing

Read responsively Psalm 136, a psalm of remembrance from your hymnals and then close with the following prayer: Thank You, Lord, for all my experiences in life, both good and bad. You have been ever-loving and trustworthy. Help me never to forget Your blessings and from where You have brought me. Thank You for making me Your child through the faith in Jesus with which You have blessed me through Holy Baptism. I rejoice that with Your loving care and wisdom, who I am today can be a blessing to a sister or brother who asks, "Why, God"? Bless me this day and everyday to rejoice in Your grace, mercy, and salvation. This I ask in the name

of Jesus, Your Son, my Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

"Why, God?" Trusting in God's Goodness in Times of Disappointment and Anger
Leader's Guide

Written by: Rev. Dr. John F. Johnson, Washington, DC
Published by: Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Devotion

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

In May of 2017 my husband and I were getting our home ready to move to our first call in Minnesota. My husband was finishing his final quarter at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. The most exciting part was we were expecting the arrival of our first child, a son named Henry. He was due in September of 2017. We were looking forward to what God had in store for us in the next few months and we were eager to wrap up our time as a seminarian couple and start a new chapter of our lives as a pastor's family.

Wednesday, May 10 was supposed to be a routine ultrasound appointment. We were so happy to see our precious son again and to hear his heartbeat. As the ultrasound began, the technician stopped the ultrasound and began rustling around with papers. She politely excused herself from the room stating she needed to print off some other documents. We waited in the room for nearly a half hour, which seemed like an eternity. Finally, a doctor entered the room and gently informed us that they could not detect a heartbeat from our son. My husband and I looked at each other in disbelief, feeling numb. At that moment I was flooded with thoughts like, "Can we do another ultrasound to double-check and disprove my disbelief? This isn't happening to us right now. What did we do wrong?" But even in the midst of our confusion, we had to trust what the doctor was saying.

We were then taken up to the hospital's labor and delivery unit and I was prepped for the delivery of our son. After informing our parents, my husband immediately called our fieldwork pastor who rushed to the hospital to be with us. We were overwhelmed with spiritual support in this dark hour of our lives. We received spiritual care from the chaplains at the hospital, the chaplain of the seminary, pastors from our previous congregations, and close family and friends. All of these people reminded us that Christ is the shining light that we cling to during this tragedy. We had spiritual reminders in overwhelming abundance and they all were true Christ-like examples of bearing one another's burdens. We were not alone. Those present constantly and gently reminded us of that fact.

These are some of the specific gentle reminders I remember: *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Romans 6:5, 7–8).*

Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... For I am sure that ... height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:34b–35, 38a–39).

We know God gave His one and only Son as a sacrifice for our sins, and He rose again to grant us eternal life with Him in heaven. As I regularly heard God's Word proclaimed and partook of

the Holy Supper every Sunday, I was reassured that Jesus suffered, died, and rose again for our unborn Henry. We trust Henry is resting in Christ's arms and we are assured that *God* works for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). God showered us with blessings and constant reminders of His unending love by those instrumental people He placed in our lives to help carry this heavy burden. They fulfilled God's law with their selfless love and care by way of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, "... *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" *There is no other commandment greater than these*" (Mark 12:31).

The best way you can comfort a mother who is mourning the loss of her child is to be present with her, even if no words are spoken at that time. In many instances words are unimportant. My husband and I cannot recall any of the phone calls we received or kind words said to us after the loss of our son, but we can remember every person who came to visit us at the hospital, and came to Henry's funeral. Actions speak volumes. It is vitally important to invest your time with these grieving mothers, even if it is out of your comfort zone and you think, "I don't know what to say." Just remember to let them know they are not alone. Be a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. Jesus constantly stepped forward in the Bible to attend to those who needed tending to the most. When we step out of our comfort zones and pray for God's guidance, the Holy Spirit takes over and helps us bear the burdens of those around us who need it the most. As God's Word says, *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:2).

Prayer: Most gracious heavenly Father, please open our hearts and give us the courage to seek out the grieving mothers in our midst and care for them. Help us to be like Jesus who sought out those who needed care. Please fill us with your Holy Spirit to be able to bear one another's burdens. Guide us to perform caring actions to help those in our midst who are hurting. In Your most precious Name we pray. Amen.

Bearing One Another's Burdens
Written by Melissa Adelsen, Glencoe, Minnesota
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



The Loss of a Child Bible Study

[Please provide: copies of this study, Bibles, hymnals, and musical accompaniment (if available)]

Sing: “Children of the Heavenly Father,” LSB 725

Opening Prayer: Almighty Father, we know that ultimately You are in control and work for the good of those who love You. There are those Christian sisters among us who are hurting because of the loss of their precious child or children. You know their hurt as You gave Your only Son as the atoning sacrifice on the cross. Please send the Holy Spirit to work through us to overcome our timid behaviors so we may care for these mourning mothers by showing Christ’s comforting love to them. In Christ’s most precious Name we pray. Amen.

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

This is the theme verse for this Bible study. In this study, we will look in-depth at how we as “women in the pew” can fulfill the law of Christ by helping to bear the burdens of those mothers who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant death. We will also examine Bible accounts that are wonderful examples of Christ which teach us how to bear one another’s burdens and how to deal with grief.

Grief

Write down a description of what grief has looked like for you personally.

Types Of Child Loss

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Miscarriage is the loss of a baby before the 20th week of pregnancy. Stillbirth is the loss of a baby after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Infant death is the loss of a baby after birth.

The Grief From Losing A Child

Several different mothers put grieving the loss of their child as this: “...the loss of many hopes and dreams.”-Johanna B. “I had random moments where the feelings would hit me such as when I was helping my young niece and nephew get ready for bed one night. The whole time I kept wondering what it would have been like to put that child to bed and read stories etc., and

would I ever have that chance...the grief never goes away completely though..."-Kathryn D.
"After losing a child, you eventually get back to 'normal' life, but you are never the same again."-
Tiffany R. "I feel like the grieving process takes over your whole life. It can be very debilitating...I
would try to pull myself together, but often times, grief would erupt anyway."-Allison H.

Explanation Of Grief

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, MD, in her book titled, *On Death and Dying*, breaks down grief into five stages:

Stage 1: Denial and Isolation

Stage 2: Anger

Stage 3: Bargaining

Stage 4: Depression

Stage 5: Acceptance.

Kubler-Ross explains in her book that each grieving person goes through each stage, but the order in which an individual may go through them is unique to each person. She goes on to explain that even though someone may have reached the acceptance stage, she may revert to other stages again at any given time. Also, a person can even go through several of the stages all at once. (Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and Their Own Families*, ©1969 by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, MD. Forward ©2015 by Ira Byock, MD. Published by Scribner, a division of Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, 1-800-897-7650 (Option 3).

Keep in mind that no two people are alike and that every person grieves differently. It is beneficial to remember these stages when talking to and/or comforting a mother who has just lost her child since they will be present in one form or another. It is good to remind her during this time that a mother's grief is perfectly natural. Also keep in mind when listening to others tell their story what the mother above shared, "*the grief never goes away completely...*" We can't put expectations or timelines on someone's healing process. Rather, we are instructed by Jesus to *bear one another's burdens*, especially through the grieving process.

Grief In The Bible

Read John 11:1–44. How did Jesus show emotion when Lazarus died? _____

From the Lazarus account, what can we learn from Jesus concerning grief? _____

How did Jesus care for Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha? _____

As we remember what Jesus did for Mary and Martha, how can we care for those experiencing grief around us? _____

Sympathy Versus Empathy

Sympathy: to feel concern for someone else without becoming involved in his or her life.

Empathy: to feel another's problems as if they were your own without actually taking them on yourself. (*Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, by Stephen Ministry, ©2000, p. 33.)

For a mother who has just lost her baby, to show empathy is far more effective than being sympathetic. Mothers have expressed that just having a concerned person with them to give them a hug, to sit with them, and to let them know they are not alone is far more effective than simply saying some well-meaning words.

One such mother shared, "I remember sitting on the couch, feeling dry, feeling as though I had no more tears to cry. When my friend walked in, she grabbed me in a hug and kissed my cheek. She was crying, crying for me and for our loss."-Claire K.

Another mother said, "We had a (church) member who really disliked me, and the first thing she did was envelope me in a hug. It's something that will stick with me forever-that even our normal disagreements temporarily melt in tragedy."-Genevieve W.

To show empathy is to be involved in another person's care. It's not just saying something nice hoping it helps. To show empathy is to care for someone through actions. Jesus is the prime example of an empathetic person. On multiple occasions in the Bible, Jesus deliberately stepped out to care for people who needed care the most. He is our true example on how to care and empathize with our neighbor.

Reflect on each instance below. Describe how Jesus showed true empathy rather than sympathy.

Luke 19:1-10: _____

John 4:1-44: _____

John 8:1-11: _____

Mark 2:1-12: _____

Luke 23:16-24:12: _____

What are some fears you may have about comforting a mother who has just lost a child?

If you have known a grieving mother in your past where you didn't feel equipped and didn't empathize with her, take heart: you are forgiven. Jesus forgives us all through His death and resurrection from the grave.

The following is a compilation of experiences shared by mothers and family members who have lost children. These are meant to be a resource for “women in the pew” to comfort mothers who have lost children.

Responses From Grieving Women Which Address Three Common Fears Of “Women In The Pew”

Fear 1: I will make this mother sad by asking about her child.

Response: This is a common misconception as one mother stated, “The fear is always that you make the mother sad if you mention their child. Mom is already sad, even if she’s not showing it all the time. You might be giving her permission to show it, but you’re not making her sad. Just be willing to witness her tears with a hand squeeze or hug and be there.”-Genevieve W.

Fear 2: I will get in the way of her and her grieving.

Response: One mother said, “I know I felt lost, like nobody else had gone through what I had.”-Michelle W. “Sitting through Mother’s Day services and All Saints’ Day services were the hardest. Two of my close friends saw how upset I was and they came to comfort me in the service. God provided comfort to me through these friends when I needed it the most.”-Melissa A.

Fear 3: I wouldn’t be of any help because I never experienced the loss of a child, I wouldn’t understand.

Response: Another mother answered, “I think actually asking me questions would be nice. I often don’t share as much as I could because I am afraid of making people feel uncomfortable. A lot of time just asking how they can help will open the door to either telling them nothing or maybe just to pray, but would also open that door to share more.”-Laura V.

How might these responses to fears calm your own fears as you approach mothers who are grieving? _____

What are some actions you could take to show empathy to a mother who just lost her child? _____

Effective Ways To Show Empathy And Comfort To A Grieving Mother

The mothers interviewed in preparation for this Bible study shared some very helpful ways that “women in the pew” can comfort and tend to grieving mothers.

1. The most common recommendation is to bring meals to them. The last thing a mother is thinking about is caring for herself physically during the initial stages of grief, let alone cooking. So organizing home cooked meals from various church members for several weeks, not days, that are delivered to their home would be a great help. As one mother shared, “No one knows what to say or what to do when your baby dies, but everyone knows how to make a casserole or have a restaurant deliver food...For a full six weeks after our daughter died, I didn’t have to worry about dinner. If I needed to spend the afternoon sleeping or crying or a combination of the two, I didn’t have to worry about whether or not my family would be fed. Those meals were invaluable in my healing process.”-Tiffany R.

2. Provide child care for their other children (if they have other children) while they have to make funeral arrangements, or just a day to themselves to grieve. Many mothers said people offered to take their children, but when they asked later on the people who offered never followed through. Please make a valiant effort to follow through. Making non-genuine offers and not following through can feel like jabs to the mother in mourning. They will cause feelings of anger, severe loneliness, and bitterness. "We had lots of offers for 'if you ever need anything...' which we tried to take people up on but it never worked out--that would be the one down-side, because the grieving doesn't stop when the funeral ends, and sometimes parents need a day to take care of themselves."-Genevieve W.

3. Just give them a hug and not say a word. Personally seek out the mother to give her the hug. Share tears with the mother over her loss. By just your physical presence, you are giving support even if you do not say anything. Over and over again, the mothers interviewed shared they did not remember much of what anyone said to them right after their loss, or who sent them cards/letters, but they distinctly recall who was there for them and who gave them hugs. Actions speak so much louder than words--actions speak to the heart. "I also think just simple hugs were helpful for me. There were a few ladies at church that came up and just hugged me and didn't even have to have a lot of words to say. The hug was nice!"-Allison H.

4. Speak of their child. This is an extremely hard thing for people to do, especially if they have never lost a child. But about their child, Call their child by their name, if the parents named him or her. Acknowledgment that their child existed is very important. Laura V. states when asked how she keeps her child's memory alive, "The way I do this the most is by sharing with people that I lost a child. I feel like so many people hide it, and I want people to be comfortable sharing this loss." "After my son, Henry, passed away, the thing that hurt the most was when I started talking about my son and someone would ignore Him by changing the topic or not acknowledging he existed. Our child existed and was very much alive, so please do not act as though he did not. Our children are created by God and are now with God."- Melissa A. Also marking down on a calendar their child's date of birth and/or expected due date so you can remember them in the future and let the grieving mother know you remember on those very hard days. Let her know she is not alone.

5. Say a simple prayer with the mother. One mother stated, "Words of prayer, I feel like would be most appropriate."-Sarah B.

6. If a mother does not feel comfortable sharing about her child the first time you ask, it is ok. Just gently try again after some time is given for her to heal. "I had a church member who persistently harshly asked how I was doing and tried to pump me for more details every time I saw her. Once she conveyed that I had grieved long enough and I should be thinking of having other children. This made me feel uneasy and unwilling to share. If she had been more gentle in her way of communicating with me I would have been more willing to share our story with her. But because of her harsh nature I clammed up and didn't share anything with her. I felt as if she was putting a time line on my grieving. This poor form of communication from her caused me to feel significant feelings of remorse and anger."- Melissa A.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving Your Son as the ultimate example of bearing our burdens through His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. Please help us use what we have learned and take this knowledge to heart, so that we may love our neighbors as ourselves and be able to empathetically bear one another's burdens. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts and give us the actions to minister to the grieving mothers we may know or will know and so fulfill the law of Christ. In His most precious Name we pray. Amen.

The Loss of a Child
Written by Melissa Adelsen, Glencoe, Minnesota
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019



The Loss of a Child: Bearing One Another's Burdens

Bible Study
Leader's Guide

[Please provide: copies of this study, Bibles, hymnals, and musical accompaniment (if available)]

Sing: "Children of the Heavenly Father," LSB 725

Opening Prayer: Almighty Father we know that ultimately You are in control and work for the good of those who love You. There are those Christian sisters among us who are hurting because of the loss of their precious child or children. You know their hurt as You gave Your only Son as the atoning sacrifice on the cross. Please send the Holy Spirit to work through us, to overcome our timid behaviors so we may care for these mourning mothers by showing Christ's comforting love to them. In Christ's most precious Name we pray. Amen.

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Grief

Write down a description of what grief has looked like for you personally. Encourage participants to share their personal descriptions without comment or judgment.

Types Of Child Loss

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Keep in mind that no two people are alike and that every person grieves differently. It is beneficial to remember these stages when talking to and/or comforting a mother who has just lost her child since they will be present in one form or another. It is good to remind her during this time that a mother's grief is perfectly natural. Also keep in mind when listening to others tell their story what the mother above shared, "the grief never goes away completely..." We can't put expectations or timelines on someone's healing process. Rather we are instructed by Jesus to *bear one another's burdens*, especially through the grieving process.

Grief In The Bible

Read John 11:1-44. How did Jesus show emotion when Lazarus died? Jesus wept (v. 35) upon seeing Mary weeping and the Jews that were with her also weeping.

From the Lazarus account, what can we learn from Jesus concerning grief? It is natural to show emotions (e.g., sadness expressed through crying) at the loss of someone. Jesus showed His human nature during this event by His tears and sorrow, and by His show of empathy to Mary and Martha.

How did Jesus care for Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha? Jesus spoke comforting words to Mary and Martha. He shared with Martha the ultimate comfort for a Christian, that He is the "resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (vv. 25-26). Jesus was also present there with the two grieving sisters.

As we remember what Jesus did for Mary and Martha, how can we care for those experiencing grief around us? Encourage women to share their ideas with the rest of the group. Some specific ways will be shared later in the Bible study.

Sympathy Versus Empathy

Sympathy: to feel concern for someone else without becoming involved in his or her life.

Empathy: to feel another's problems as if they were your own without actually taking them on yourself. (*Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, by Stephen Ministry, ©2000, p. 33.)

For a mother who has just lost her baby, to show empathy is far more effective than being sympathetic. Mothers have expressed that just having a concerned person with them to give them a hug, to sit with them, and to let them know they are not alone is far more effective than simply saying some well-meaning words.

One such mother shared, "I remember sitting on the couch, feeling dry, feeling as though I had no more tears to cry. When my friend walked in, she grabbed me in a hug and kissed my cheek. She was crying, crying for me and for our loss."-Claire K.

Another mother said, "We had a (church) member who really disliked me, and the first thing she did was envelope me in a hug. It's something that will stick with me forever-that even our normal disagreements temporarily melt in tragedy."-Genevieve W.

To show empathy is to be involved in another person's care. It's not just saying something nice hoping it helps. To show empathy is to care for someone through actions. Jesus is the prime example of an empathetic person. On multiple occasions in the Bible, Jesus deliberately stepped out to care for people who needed care the most. He is our true example on how to care and empathize with our neighbor.

Reflect on each instance below and describe how Jesus shows true empathy rather than sympathy.

Luke 19:1-10: Jesus showed empathy through His action. He sought out Zacchaeus and spent time with him. Jesus didn't just tell him well-meaning words and walk away. Jesus went into Zacchaeus' home and spent time with him.

John 4:1-44: Jesus took the time to teach the Samaritan woman at the well the truth that He is the Savior. He spent time with this woman who was considered an outcast in her society because of her behavior. Jesus did not look at this woman as an enemy because of her race. Instead, Jesus loved her and cared for her spiritual life. Jesus knew she needed His care.

John 8:1-11: This account is another example of Jesus' care for those with whom no one else wanted to deal. Like the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, this Bible account shows Jesus' care and concern for women, who at that time in history had few, if any, rights in society. No one wanted to interact with the woman caught in adultery, other than to punish her. All present except for Jesus despised her and wanted to stone her. But Jesus took the time to speak with her and to lead her to repentance. Jesus also pointed out the sinful nature of those around her which shows His concern for the spiritual life of all people.

Mark 2:1-12: This Bible account is but one of many in the Scriptures where Jesus shows loving action to those who are outcasts because of a physical condition. Other than his four friends who took him to Jesus, most people in society at that time wouldn't even look at this man who was paralyzed. But Jesus saw him, spoke to him, forgave his sins, and healed his physical difficulties.

Luke 23:16-24:12: The account of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is the ultimate example of taking on the burdens of others. Jesus loves us so much that He suffered and died in our place. He bore the punishment we deserved for our sins when He took the burden of all our sins upon Himself. Through faith in Him, our sins are forgiven and we have spiritual life for eternity.

What are some fears you may have about comforting a mother who has just lost a child?
Encourage individuals to share fears they may have.

If you have known a grieving mother in your past where you didn't feel equipped and didn't empathize with her, take heart: you are forgiven. Jesus forgives us all through His death and resurrection from the grave.

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Response: One mother said, "I know I felt lost, like nobody else had gone through what I had."-Michelle W. "Sitting through Mother's Day services and All Saints' Day services were the hardest. Two of my close friends saw how upset I was and they came to comfort me in the service. God provided comfort to me through these friends when I needed it the most."-Melissa A.

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Response: Another mother answered, "I think actually asking me questions would be nice. I often don't share as much as I could because I am afraid of making people feel uncomfortable. A lot of time just asking how they can help will open the door to either telling them nothing or maybe just to pray, but would also open that door to share more."-Laura V.

How might these responses to fears calm your own fears as you approach mothers who are grieving? The responses of these mothers show that your loving presence and kind questions are welcome.

What are some actions you could take to show empathy to a mother who just lost her child? As participants share ideas, have them reflect again on the ways in which Jesus showed empathy to those in grief and in need. Jesus met the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those who were hurting. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He works in us today to feed, comfort, love, and share His saving and life-giving Word with grieving mothers.

Effective Ways To Show Empathy And Comfort To A Grieving Mother

The mothers interviewed in preparation for this Bible study shared some very helpful ways that “women in the pew” can comfort and tend to grieving mothers.

1. The most common recommendation is to bring meals to them. The last thing a mother is thinking about is caring for herself physically during the initial stages of grief, let alone cooking. So organizing home cooked meals from various church members for several weeks, not days, that are delivered to their home would be a great help. As one mother shared, “No one knows what to say or what to do when your baby dies, but everyone knows how to make a casserole or have a restaurant deliver food...For a full six weeks after our daughter died, I didn’t have to worry about dinner. If I needed to spend the afternoon sleeping or crying or a combination of the two, I didn’t have to worry about whether or not my family would be fed. Those meals were invaluable in my healing process.”-Tiffany R.

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4. Speak of their child. This is an extremely hard thing for people to do, especially if they have never lost a child. But ask about their child, Call their child by their name, if the parents named him or her. Acknowledgment that their child existed is very important. Laura V. states when asked how she keeps her child’s memory alive, “The way I do this the most is by sharing with people that I lost a child. I feel like so many people hide it, and I want people to be comfortable sharing this loss.” “After my son, Henry, passed away, the thing that hurt the most was when I started talking about my son and someone would ignore him by changing the topic or not acknowledging he existed. Our child existed and was very much alive, so please do not act as though he did not. Our children are created by God and are now with God.”- Melissa A. Also marking down on a calendar their child’s date of birth and/or expected due date so you can remember them in the future and let the grieving mother know you remember on those very hard days. Let her know she is not alone.

5. Say a simple prayer with the mother. One mother stated, “Words of prayer, I feel like would be most appropriate.”-Sarah B.

6. If a mother does not feel comfortable sharing about her child the first time you ask, it is ok. Just gently try again after some time is given for her to heal. “I had a church member who persistently harshly asked how I was doing and tried to pump me for more details every time I

saw her. Once she conveyed that I had grieved long enough and I should be thinking of having other children. This made me feel uneasy and unwilling to share. If she had been more gentle in her way of communicating with me I would have been more willing to share our story with her. But because of her harsh nature I clammed up and didn't share anything with her. I felt as if she was putting a time line on my grieving. This poor form of communication from her caused me to feel significant feelings of remorse and anger.”- Melissa A.

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving Your Son as the ultimate example of bearing our burdens through His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. Please help us use what we have learned and take this knowledge to heart, so that we may love our neighbors as ourselves and be able to empathetically bear one another's burdens. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts and give us the actions to minister to the grieving mothers we may know or will know and so fulfill the law of Christ. In His most precious Name we pray. Amen.

The Loss of a Child
Leader's Guide
Written by Melissa Adelsen, Glencoe, Minnesota
Published by Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2019

LWML Mission Statement

The mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League is to assist each woman of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world.

The League (LWML) Pledge

In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption, we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have, and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His kingdom, our will to do His will and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and erring into eternal fellowship with Him. Amen.

Authored by Rev. Harry Fricke ©1955 LWML

"Lutheran Women, One and All"

1. Lutheran Women, one and all, we have heard the Gospel call
We by faith have seen the Lord Crucified and then restored.
We have seen Him pay the price For our sins a sacrifice
Him we Lord and Christ acclaim And unite to praise His name.
2. Lutheran Women, young and old Well we know His challenge bold
Help to take the Gospel Light To a world in darkest night.
By example in the home By inviting those who roam
By our prayers for sinners lost By our gifts for missions' cost.
3. Lutheran Women coast to coast In the Lord a mighty host
Let us all united be In the Holy Trinity.
One in faith in hope and love Working for the Lord above
Till our earthly labor's done We in heaven shall all be one.

Tune: LSB 892, LW 495
Elmer A. Kettner

“Serve the Lord with Gladness”

1. “Serve the Lord with gladness!” It is He alone
Who redeemed us sinners, Guides us as His own
To enjoy the blessings Of His love and grace,
Will at last in glory Meet us face to face.
Onward, then, for Jesus! Let this be our aim:
“Serve the Lord with gladness!” Glorify His name!
2. “Serve the Lord with gladness!” He gave us command
To proclaim His Gospel Now in ev’ry land
So that fellow sinners May, like us, be blest.
Leading them to Jesus, We can serve Him best.
Onward, then, for Jesus! Let this be our aim:
“Serve the Lord with gladness!” Glorify His name!
3. “Serve the Lord with gladness!” There’s no greater joy
Than to serve the Master, Work in His employ.
As we build His kingdom Angels, too, rejoice
Over ev’ry sinner Brought to hear His voice.
Onward, then, for Jesus! Let this be our aim:
“Serve the Lord with gladness!” Glorify His name!

“Praise, Love, Serve”

Based on The League (LWML) Pledge

1. Our God and Father made the earth, And when we went astray,
Our God, the Son, descended here To take our sins away.
With His own blood He bought us. He broke our bonds of sin.
Then God the Spirit came into Our hearts to dwell within.
2. In gratitude we pledge ourselves, To Him with all we have.
Our hands will work; our voices sing; Our lips proclaim His love.
His errands we’ll do gladly; His Gospel we’ll defend;
Our silver and our gold we’ll use—His kingdom to extend.
3. Wherever He has need of us, We will His call obey.
Whenever He calls out to us, We’ll answer right away.
His will is ours that lost souls Will turn away from sin
And come to have eternal life Through fellowship with Him.

Author: Jean Hansen Kammerer

Tune: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” LSB 361, TLH 647, LW 60

The League Pledge: Rev. Harry Fricke ©1955 LWML



Where My Treasure Is

Mite Offering Litany

(Leader's responses quoted from "Jesus, Thou Art Mine Forever, TLH 357, vv. 1–2, 4)

[Please provide: individuals to read the "Leader" and the "Reader" sections, a copy for each attendee]

LEADER: "Jesus, Thou art mine forever, dearer far than earth to me;"

READER: Lord, we thank You for Your Word that helps us understand what real treasure is. Real treasure isn't a fine house, a fast car, designer shoes, or extravagant travels. All these things, for sure, are blessings, but they also fade with time and use.

ALL: Help us, Lord, in our lives, to distinguish WANTS from NEEDS.

LEADER: "Neither life nor death shall sever those sweet ties which bind to Thee."

READER: Lord God, You remind us, that *neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38–39). What a comfort to remember You are always with us.

ALL: May those "lucky pennies" we find be useful mites for Your kingdom.

LEADER: "Thou alone are all my Treasure, Who hast died that I may live;"

READER: Out of Your love for us and all people, You died and rose so that we might live for eternity. No one else could do this. That makes You the only true Treasure.

ALL: Extend the change in the bottom of our purses to become avenues of love for ministering to Your people.

LEADER: "Thou conferest noblest pleasure, Who dost all my sins forgive."

READER: There is nothing You don't know about us, Lord—our sins of omission as well as commission—and You offer forgiveness for all of them.

ALL: Use our "intentional gifts"—those coins we regularly drop into our Mite Boxes—to tell those who don't know yet that their sins are forgiven, too.

LEADER: "Brightest gems and fairest flowers lose their beauty in Thy frown;"

READER: Lord, You have indeed made beautiful things in nature: the mountains, rushing streams, wild flowers. Yet the calm they offer is only temporary.

ALL: Give the recipients of mites in ministries the understanding that the *WORD* that comes with the *WORK* is the real and lasting gift.

LEADER: “Joy and peace, like balmy showers, in Thy smile come gently down.”

READER: Remind us, Lord, that because of Jesus and by the Holy Spirit’s direction, we can look to You in confidence and *be anxious for nothing*. Help us remember that we can come to You in prayer with all needs and that Your *peace which surpasses all understanding, will guard [our] hearts and minds through Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6–7).

ALL: Bless all our efforts to raise money for mites so they may have an impact on those who plan them as well as the mission grants they support.

LEADER: “Jesus, Thou art mine forever; never suffer me to stray.
Let me in my weakness never cast my priceless pearl away.”

READER: Some of us might have heard on our Confirmation day words spoken by our Savior: “*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Revelation 2:10b). What a promise!

ALL: Remind us that every time money goes into our Mite Boxes that You are the reason we give so that the Gospel message might be shared.

LEADER: “Lamb of God, I do implore Thee: guard, support me, lest I fall.
Let me evermore adore Thee. Be my everlasting All.”

READER: “Let me be Thine forever, my faithful God and Lord; Let me forsake Thee never nor wander from Thy Word. Lord, do not let me waver, but give me steadfastness, and for such grace forever Thy holy name I’ll bless” (LSB 689, v. 1).

ALL: As we ask that these mites be used to extend your kingdom at home and around the globe we also remember Your words: “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:19–20).

ALL: These things we ask in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Where My Treasure Is
Mite Offering Litany
Written by Judy Delve, Westminster, CO
Published by Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019



The Mite Box Legacy

Sketch

[Please provide: one younger woman and one older woman, two copies of this skit, two large cardboard moving-type boxes, two chairs, a Mite Box with some coins in it, and a woman's purse.]

Before the sketch: Set the two boxes in front of the audience. Place two chairs behind the boxes. Give the Mite Box to Mary, who stands out of view of the audience. Place the purse next to one of the chairs.

Mom: [Pantomimes filling boxes with old “stuff” as she talks to herself.] Boy oh boy, I can’t believe all the stuff my mother collected over the years. And now I’m stuck dealing with it.

Mary: [Runs in with the Mite Box in her hand.] Mom! Mom! MOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Mom: Heavens, Mary! What is it now? Can’t you see I’m busy?

Mary: [Breathlessly] Mom! [Holds out the Mite Box so all can see.] I found this little box on Grandma’s dresser. Isn’t it cute? And it makes noise when you shake it! I think it’s a musical instrument like the things we shake in children’s choir! [Shakes Mite Box and dances.]

Mom: I don’t think that’s what it is, Mary.

Mary: [Continues to hold up Mite Box.] Well, it’s very heavy. Hey! Maybe it’s a door stop. [Bends down and puts the Mite Box on the floor in front of an imaginary door.] See! It’s holding the door open.

Mom: Mary, that’s not a door stop.

Mary: [Holds the Mite Box opening up to her eye and looks inside.] MOM! There’s money in here! Lots of money!

Mom: Mary, I’m sure there are some coins in there but it probably doesn’t add up to much.

Mary: [Looks downcast.] Oh. [Pauses slightly.] Well, then can I use it for my doll’s treasure chest? Please, huh?

Mom: [Sits down in one of the chairs and sighs.] Mary, come and sit with me.

Mary: [Sits down in the chair next to her mom.] Mom? Are you okay?

Mom: Oh Mary, seeing that little box makes me miss your grandmother even more. That little box is her LWML Mite Box.

Mary: [Quickly hands the Mite Box to her mom.] What did you say? Do you mean there are bugs in the box?

Mom: [Smiles slightly.] No, Mary, not that kind of “mite”. Do you remember the story of the widow’s mite from last week’s Sunday school lesson?

Mary: Uh, yeah, but what does that have to do with this box?

Mom: Well, LWML Mite Boxes are based on the example of what the widow did in the Bible account. The widow gave God all she had. We give God whatever we have, no matter how small. The ladies of the LWML adopted that idea many years ago and they have been putting coins in those little Mite Boxes for a very long time.

Mary: Wow! Like for thousands of years?

Mom: Not quite, more like over 75 years. Over all those years, those coins from Mite Boxes just like this one have added up to millions of dollars. Those mission offerings have supported missionaries and mission projects that have shared the love and care of Jesus in dozens and dozens of countries around the world.

Mary: [Amazed] Wow! Grandma contributed to that?

Mom: Yes, Mary, your grandma was very active in the LWML and in sharing her faith and the love of Jesus.

Mary: [Pauses thoughtfully.] Mom, do you think we could keep using Grandma’s Mite Box?

Mom: [Stands and gives Mary a hug.] Yes, of course, Mary! [Hands the Mite Box back to Mary.] Why don’t you put Grandma’s Mite Box in my purse so we can take it home. [Mary does so.] Now come and help me finish cleaning out this closet.

The Mite Box Legacy
Written by: Candy Habich, Blountville, TN
Published by: Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, 2019

Planning Purposeful Programs

Whenever you plan a program, please keep in mind the following:

- **PRAY.** Always begin with prayer. Prayer was an important part of the work of the Christian Resource Editors Committee as these program materials were assembled. Asking the Lord for His guidance and direction as you plan your program will help assure that His purpose for your group will be the focus as you proceed.
- **PREPARE.** Interesting, Spirit-filled, meaningful, and productive programs don't just happen! They take preparation. Ask yourself: "What is our purpose for this program?" Consider the women who will attend. Consider new women whom you would like to engage. Remember, an event is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.
- **SET GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** Assemble your board, team, or committee to set goals and objectives complementary to the mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League. Then select activities to meet these goals and objectives. Use a variety of approaches. This resource manual will assist you. Balance in-reach and outreach. Develop a timeline to ensure planning is completed.
- **SELECT AND INSTRUCT NECESSARY PERSONNEL.** Determine the personnel needed and then choose women to lead the various program components, according to their talents and gifts. Provide them with a job description if appropriate. Remember that vague instructions frustrate people. Choose leaders far enough in advance so preparation can occur. Train them, if necessary. Pair newer members with more experienced leaders to help them grow in their leadership skills. Invite women who do not normally volunteer and perhaps uncover previously undiscovered talents. Let your team sense your commitment to the job at hand. Communicate enthusiasm and encouragement!
- **PUBLICIZE.** In order to participate, women must know when and where an event will occur. Use all means available to publicize upcoming events including your church website, your church's Facebook page, posters, bulletin and newsletter announcements, email, other social media, texting, and most importantly, invitations in person or via phone calls. Start early!
- **PRACTICE HOSPITALITY.** Acts of hospitality gain members! Help make participants feel welcome and included with special touches such as name tags, ice breaker activities, door prizes, group participation activities, and refreshments. Allow and encourage women to use their gifts in ministry in their group, church, community, and the world. If your event includes a guest speaker or other special guests, be sure to introduce these guests to the group at the very beginning of your program.
- **FOLLOW-UP.** A response card (p. 000) is beneficial for feedback and follow-up after an event. It helps you to evaluate the event, and it gives an opportunity to tell those who attended, "What's next?" Response cards should include open-ended responses such as: "A highlight of this event was ...", "An idea for a future event is ...", "I would like to help with ...". Be sure to include space for contact information: responder's name, address, phone number and email address, or whatever you need, especially if you have new attendees.

Program Planning Page

Program Date/Time _____ Planning Meeting Date _____

Program Theme _____

Target Participants _____

Program Objective _____

Icebreaker _____ Leader _____

Devotion _____ Leader _____

Music _____ Leader _____

Bible Study _____ Leader _____

Speaker _____ Topic _____

Sketch, etc. _____

Participants _____

Mission Grant/Mite Box Devotion _____ Leader _____

Unfinished/New Business _____

Announcements _____

Closing Devotion _____ Leader _____

Mission Service Project _____

Refreshment Committee _____

Special Project _____

Zone Event: Date _____ Place _____

Our Responsibilities _____

District Event: Date _____ Place _____

RESPONSE CARD

Name of the event: _____

A highlight of this event was: _____

An idea for a future event is: _____

I would like to help with: _____

Your name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

RESPONSE CARD

Name of the event: _____

A highlight of this event was: _____

An idea for a future event is: _____

I would like to help with: _____

Your name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

BASIC MEETING PROGRAM

1. **Call to Order** (one tap of the gavel)
The president says, "The meeting will please come to order." President welcomes and introduces guests. Note: It is courteous to all present to begin on time.
2. **Opening Devotion and/or Bible Study**
3. **Roll Call** (optional, best accomplished by sign-in sheet)
4. **Reading and Approval of Minutes**
The president says, "The secretary will read the minutes of the last (or September, etc.) meeting." (Secretary stands and reads.) The president asks, "Are there any corrections to the minutes?" (Pause) "If not, they stand approved as read." If there are corrections, they are usually accepted by general consent (everyone in agreement, but no formal vote taken). The president then declares, "The minutes stand approved as corrected." The secretary then may read any correspondence.
5. **Financial Statement**
The president says, "We will now have the treasurer's report." OR "The treasurer will now give the financial statement." (The treasurer stands and reads. The treasurer need only state the beginning balance, the receipts, the disbursements, and the ending balance.) The president asks, "Are there any questions for the treasurer?" (Pause) "The report will be filed."
6. **Reports of Other Officers, Boards, and Standing Committees**
Report in the order listed in the bylaws, with the president reporting first.
7. **Unfinished Business/General Orders**
Unfinished business is business brought over from a previous meeting because adjournment occurred before the agenda was completed. General orders are items that were postponed to the present meeting for action.
8. **New Business**
The president asks, "Is there any new business?" The president introduces new items of business requiring action. Members may also make motions as long as no other question is pending. Out of courtesy, a member should notify the president if she intends to present an item of new business. The president may ask, "Is there any further new business?"
9. **Announcements** (placed here or after the program)
The president reads from a prepared list, including the time, date, and location of the next meeting and then asks, "Are there any further announcements?"
10. **Program**
The program is usually presented before the meeting is adjourned. Some groups have the program before the business portion of the meeting. The president says, "The program chairman will present the program (speaker)." At its conclusion, the program chairman states, "Madam Chairman, that concludes our program." The president thanks the chairman and the speaker. She then guides the assembly to the next item of business.
11. **Adjournment**
There may be a formal motion to adjourn, but it is not required. The president may ask, "Is there any further business?" (Pause) "Since there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned." (one tap of the gavel)
12. **Closing Prayer/Hymn**

(Additional meeting helps found at www.lwml.org. Click on "Service" on the top bar, then "Group Resources." In the sidebar, click on "Meeting Helps.")



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Mission: Assist each woman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world.

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