

Every Picture Can Tell God's Story

Winsome Witnessing
of Jesus Using Photographs

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STUDY EDITION





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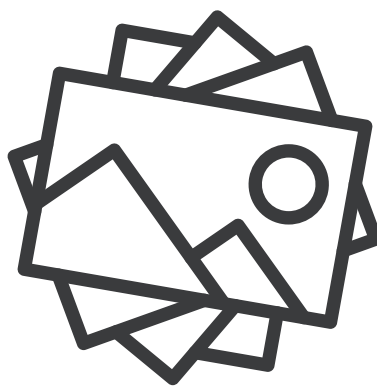


Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Snapshot Session 1: Exposing The Light	5
Snapshot Session 2: Opening our Lenses	10
Snapshot Session 3: Setting Our Focus	16
Snapshot Session 4: Composing Our Witness	22
Snapshot Session 5: Processing Our Images	27
Snapshot Session 6: Exhibiting Our Albums	31
About the Author	35

Introduction

They mark the moments, days, years, and decades of our lives. They commemorate special occasions and everyday events. They record the beauty of the world, as well as things that are not so beautiful. They express the gamut of human emotion. They help us to remember our history, as well as the history of those who came before us.

“They” are photographs, those images we have on our phones and computers and the printed images we paste in albums, display in frames, send as Christmas cards, and often stuff in drawers, boxes, and trunks. Photographs can be one of our most treasured possessions. In fact, when asked what they would grab and save from their homes in a fire besides family members and pets, photographs are often mentioned as valuable and irreplaceable.

What use do you make of the photographs you’ve taken or received? Have you used them as a way to witness Jesus’ saving love and God’s power and provision in our lives? Photographs can provide a gateway to share the Gospel. The images you’ve captured through the lens of your camera can tell God’s story in a unique, creative, and compelling way.

The six sessions of this study are designed to open your eyes to new ways in which you can be a winsome witness of Jesus using your own personal photographs and experiences. You’ll see how the photographed images of a child’s smiling face, sunlight filtering through clouds after a storm, snow-capped mountain peaks, a rugged hiking path, friends celebrating a birthday, community workers serving others after a natural disaster, a young hand embracing another hand worn with age, family portraits, a peaceful fishing pond, and the other images captured in the past can help you tell God’s story of salvation with meaning and conviction.

Since the object of this study is to create a Witness Album, it lends itself to utilizing several different mediums. You may choose to make a traditional scrapbook or small photo album, but if you have access to the internet, Canva, Shutterfly, or Snapfish could be options.

Since there is a very convenient type of media in the palm of your hand, your cell phone, you may opt to create a gallery of photos. What is unique about this study is that naturally leads to intergenerational connections by utilizing the technological skills of the younger women.

The Word of God promises, *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it”* (Isaiah 55:10–11). The Word always brings the results which God desires. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may the Word of God and your photographs help you share His story!



Snapshot Session 1: Exposing The Light

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Materials Needed:

- this study
- ESV Bible
- *Lutheran Service Book*
- completed *Witness Album* (leader only)

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are the Creator of all things. As we view all that You have created, we see unlimited imagination and creativity. We also see order and purpose. We thank You for all that You have created for us to enjoy. By the power of the Holy Spirit, open our eyes and intellect as we study Your Word. As we look at the kinds of light portrayed in Holy Scripture, expose us to the truth You desire us to know. Help us rejoice that whenever we bask in the light of the world who is Jesus, You help our hearts, minds, thoughts, and actions to reflect Your saving love. Enlighten us also to begin to see ways in which we can use the photographs we’ve taken to share Jesus, the light of the world, with those who are still in darkness. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



Viewfinding Activity Mental Photos

What visual image first comes to mind as you complete the following statement: **The most amazing display of light I’ve ever seen in God’s creation is ...?**

Tell about this image as you introduce yourself to others in your group.



Zooming into God’s Word “Let There Be Light”

The word photography is defined as “writing or painting with light.” When taking a photograph, a certain amount of light is essential. Without any light or with an insufficient amount of light, the desired image cannot be captured.

Without the presence of physical light, the ability to physically see becomes difficult, if not impossible. One of the most striking events during a tour of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky is when the guides turn off all the lanterns. It is so dark a person cannot even see her hand in front of her face. Individuals who have been lost in the cave and later found were often driven crazy by the lack of light. One man was found aimlessly banging two rocks together just to maintain some sort of control over his environment.

In the Bible, light is mentioned from the beginning.

1. Read Genesis 1:2. Describe what the earth looked like according to this verse.
2. Read Genesis 1:3. What was the first thing God did as He put the earth in order?
3. What does God's action tell you about the importance of physical light in the world?
4. Have you ever taken a photograph outside at night? Without the use of special lenses and special speed film, how did the photograph turn out? Why?

Two Kinds of Light/Two Kinds of Sight

The process of physical light interacting with specific parts of our eyes and brain are what allow us to have physical sight. Physical sight is a miracle of God in His creation of people. The cornea, the clear front window of the eye, and the lens focus light sharply onto the retina at the back of the eye. The retina contains light sensitive nerve cells called rods and cones. Energy from physical light produces chemical changes in the rods and cones which, in turn, produce electrical activity. The rods and cones join at the back of the eye to form the optic nerve. Electrical impulses picked up by the rods and cones are transferred by the optic nerve to the visual cortex of the brain. The visual cortex of the brain then makes sense of the impulses, so that what is seen is recognized and acted upon.

The Bible speaks of another kind of light and sight that does not involve light rays and eyes.

5. Read John 8:12. Describe the kind of light this verse describes.

6. Carefully read John 1:1–9. List three qualities of Jesus as the Light described in these verses.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

7. Read Proverbs 4:18–19 and John 12:44–46. Why do we need Jesus?

8. How do we receive spiritual light? See Colossians 1:13–14 and Ephesians 2:8–9.

The Biblical account of Jesus healing Bartimaeus beautifully illustrates the two kinds of light and the two kinds of sight in the world. Read this story in Mark 10:46–52.

9. In regards to physical light, what was wrong with Bartimaeus?

10. Reread verses 46 and 47. Describe Bartimaeus' quality of life due to his blindness?

11. How might your view of the world and your participation in it be different if you could not physically see?
12. How has your sense of physical sight enhanced your memories of important events in your life?
13. As Bartimaeus repeatedly called out to Jesus for help, he called Him the “Son of David” (vv. 47–48). What does the use of this title, as well as Bartimaeus’ request for Jesus’ mercy, indicate concerning his relationship with Jesus?
14. What kind of sight had already been given to Bartimaeus even though he could not yet physically see (v. 52)?
15. Reread verse 51. What kind of sight does Bartimaeus ask Jesus to restore?
16. How would your view of the world and your participation in it be different if you could not spiritually see?
17. How has your God-given gift of spiritual sight enhanced your memories of important events in your life?

18. Without enough exposure to Jesus, what happens to our spiritual light?



Wide-Angle Witness

The purpose of this Bible study/retreat is to give you a unique tool to use as you tell God's story of salvation.

Look back at Mark 10:52.

19. After Jesus restored Bartimaeus' physical sight, what did Bartimaeus do?

20. In what ways might you use photographs you've taken to illustrate the truths of spiritual light vs. spiritual darkness to someone who does not yet know Jesus?

Closing Prayer

Dearest Lord Jesus, You are the Light of the world. We thank and praise You for coming to the world to save us from the darkness of sin, death, and Satan. Open our eyes to those around us who are still in darkness. Help us to share Your light with them so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, their eyes may be opened to Your truth and they may see You as their Lord and Savior. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Looking Ahead

For the next session, select and bring with you three or four photographs whose images remind you of a quality of Jesus or of a Scriptural truth. You will use them during the "Wide-Angle Witness" section of Snapshot Session 2.



Snapshot 2: Opening our Lenses

The LORD opens the eyes of the blind (Psalm 146:8a).

Materials Needed:

- this study
- ESV Bible
- *Lutheran Service Book*
- participants' personal photographs either on their phone or printed images
- colored pencils and crayons, many colors
- completed *Witness Album* (leader only)

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, Your light of truth pierces the darkness of our sin and shows us that You are the way to heaven. Thank You for this day and for the opportunity You give us to gather together to study Your Word. Open our eyes today to the many images in Holy Scripture that help us to know You. Open our minds to creative possibilities to share these Scriptural images and our photographs as we tell Your story to others. In Your name we pray. Amen.



Viewfinding Activity

Images of Jesus

In Snapshot Session 1, we discussed the Biblical visual image, “Jesus is the light of the world.” Recall other visual images of Jesus found in the Bible. Which one holds the most meaning for you?

On the next page, use colored pencils or crayons to draw this image of Jesus. Do not use any human figures in your picture. In other words, don’t draw what you think Jesus looks like. Instead, illustrate your chosen Biblical image of Jesus using color, shapes, as well as the image of Jesus as described in the Bible. You will share the image you create as a part of this session’s Bible study.



Zooming into God's Word

Visual Images and the Bible

1. What visual images from Bible events stand out in your memory? Images can include those from specific and actual biblical events, as well as those that are meant to be descriptive or poetic.
2. Why do you think that the Bible contains so many visual images?

Most of the long-term memories in our brains are stored as either visual images, verbal images, or a combination of both. The brain goes through a complex process to store these images. Each hemisphere of the brain has a visual cortex where visual images are stored. Recent research describes the brain as a “visio-spatial sketch pad.” On this sketch pad are mapped the images we see, their shapes, colors, and forms, and how they relate to one another within our environments.

There has been much research lately concerning individuals who claim to have eidetic (photographic) memories. These individuals remember everything they see. Scientists are currently uncertain as to whether or not this is truly possible. Through experiments, it has been noted that children are far more able than adults to accurately remember visual images. This explains why childhood events often stand out in our minds much more than what we did more recently. Research shows that for any age, memory is enhanced when facts and concepts are paired with a visual image.

Our awesome heavenly Father created us with brains that can think, reason, and remember. Since He designed our brains, it is no surprise that the Bible, God's written Word, is filled with visual images to help us remember the truths of salvation.

Visual Images of Jesus in the Bible

3. As you began Snapshot Session 2, you were asked to sketch a visual image of Jesus from the Bible. Show the image you drew to the others in your group. Tell about a time when recalling this visual image played an important part in your faith life.

Many meaningful and memorable visual images of Jesus are used in Holy Scripture. These images describe who Jesus is and what He does for us. Just as the other visual images found in the Bible, these visual images of Jesus help us to better understand and know Him.

4. After each reference, list the visual image used in it to describe Jesus.

a. Psalm 18:2 _____

b. Isaiah 11:1 _____

c. John 4:10 _____

d. John 6:35 _____

e. John 10:9 _____

f. John 10:11 _____

g. John 15:1 _____

h. Ephesians 2:20 _____

In more than one place in Holy Scripture, Jesus is pictured as a shepherd (e.g., Psalm 23:1, Isaiah 40:11, 1 Peter 2:25). There is another visual image used for Jesus in both the Old and New Testament that is closely related to a shepherd. Read the chain of passages in the order they are listed below, then identify the visual image of Jesus that these passages either foreshadow or describe.

Genesis 22:8; Exodus 12:1–13; Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7b; Revelation 5:12

5. What is the visual image named in all these verses that describes Jesus?

6. How does the use of this visual image help you better understand what Jesus has done for you as your Savior?



Wide-Angle Witness

Take out the photographs that you brought with you to this session. In the space below, jot down a brief description of each photograph, as well as a quality of Jesus of which it reminds you or a biblical truth which the photograph illustrates.

Now gather together in small groups of 4-6 women. Show your photographs to the others in your group. Share any background information about the photo, as well as the biblical connection(s) in each. Allow those within your group to add any additional connections they see in your photos. Add these ideas to those you previously listed.

After your small-group sharing, rejoin as one large group and discuss the following:

7. Based on your small-group discussions, what are some categories into which the types of photographs you've chosen and viewed fall? For example, one category might be named "Scenes from Nature." List the categories you come up with in the first column in the chart below.

Photo Categories

Scenes from Nature

Biblical Connections

God's power, God's goodness,
God's care and concern for the world,
the beauty of God's creation, God's
provision for people, specific Psalms which
reference nature

8. Now go back and add biblical connection ideas that would fit within each category of the photograph. If Bible passages come to mind, reference them as well.

9. Berenice Abbott (1898–1991) was an American photographer best known for her black and white photographs of New York City architecture and design in the 1930's. A quote attributed to her is "photography helps people to see." What are

some specific ways that the visual images in your photographs, combined with Holy Scripture and biblical truths, can open up avenues of discussion to help people “see” Jesus and tell God’s story?

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus, You are our loving Savior! The Bible tells the story of all that You have done and continue to do in our lives. God inspired those who wrote the Holy Scriptures to use many visual images to help us understand Your truths and to know You and Your perfect peace and goodness. Continue to keep our eyes open to visual images around us so that we can tell others of You. Help us see those around us who need to know Your saving love. In Your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Looking Ahead

For the remaining Snapshot sessions, you will need 10 photographs for your *Witness Album*. The photographs you select can be varied in their biblical connection or they can work together to illustrate a particular biblical theme (e.g., the story of salvation, God’s creation, the sanctity of life, God’s care for us, God’s comfort, God’s promises). Bring these photographs with you to the next session.



Snapshot 3: Setting Our Focus

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2a NIV).

Materials Needed:

- this study
- ESV Bible
- *Lutheran Service Book*
- several ESV concordances, either separate volumes or from the back of Bibles (at least two per each small group)
- participants’ personal photographs
- completed *Witness Album* (leader only)

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, because of You and Your unselfish actions as our Savior, we have God’s gifts of forgiveness, eternal life, spiritual peace and security, as well as a home in heaven. Thank You, dearest Jesus, for Your saving love. Although we trust You and love You, there are times when our focus leaves You and instead rests on earthly and/or sinful pursuits. Forgive us, Lord, for these times when our focus may be blurred or misguided. Through Your Word and Your Sacraments, direct us to keep our eyes, hearts, and focus always on You and on Your will. As we continue to focus today on developing a meaningful witness tool to tell others Your story, help us remember that its purpose is to share the truth of Your saving love to those who do not yet know it or who have lost their focus on it. Bless our endeavors to further Your kingdom. In Your name we pray. Amen.



Viewfinding Activity **Finding Your Focus**

After greeting your fellow sisters in Christ as you arrive, take a few moments to make two lists. First, list some specific things that you do to help you focus on Jesus at worship, in your personal Bible study time, and throughout your day.

Then list some specific things that can cause you to lose focus during these same times.

You will share your lists later in this session.

In order to take clear and compelling photographs, the camera lens must be clearly set and focused on the image to be photographed. In order to live clearly directed lives which glorify and serve God, our eyes must be set and focused on Jesus our Savior. Before you begin the Bible study for this session, carefully read Hebrews 12:2a (printed at the top of the page). As you make your way through this snapshot session, keep these words in mind.

Zooming into God's Word **Blurred Vision**

Have you ever looked at a photograph that was grossly out of focus? The blurred images of such a photo is not only confusing, but can also cause great discomfort if looked at for too long. The same can be said when our eyes have difficulty focusing. The images around us become distorted, blurred, even unrecognizable. When our eyes are not properly focused, the activities we want to do become difficult, if not impossible.

Proper focus is essential for clear physical sight. Proper focus is also essential for clear spiritual sight. Blurred spiritual sight was a problem for many of the people Jesus encountered during His earthly ministry. Blurred spiritual vision was especially problematic for the Pharisees, so much so that their unfocused eyes blinded them to the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah and hardened their hearts to His message of the salvation, light, and life found only in Him.

It is ironic that the first time Jesus proclaimed, “*I am the light of the world*” (John 8:12) was as He addressed the Pharisees in the temple court near the treasury (the place where the offerings were gathered). Historically, the Pharisees were aware of the messianic prophecies about light found in the Old Testament. The Pharisees would have read and studied such prophecies as Isaiah 42:7 where God promised to give His people “*a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind.*” Jesus used this visual description because He knew it was one the Jews would understand. Despite this, the Pharisees rejected Jesus’ testimony that He is the Messiah. [*The Lutheran Study Bible*, Concordia Publishing House, page 1785 and study notes for John 8:12–13, page 1796.]

Following this confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees in the temple, He and His disciples encountered a man born blind. Read about what happened in John 9:1–41.

1. Reread verses 3–5. What are the “works of God” (v. 3) that were displayed in the man who was blind from birth? See also verse 7 and verse 38.
2. How did the Pharisees react when the now sighted man was brought to them (vv. 13–33)?

3. What does Jesus mean in verses 39–41?

4. Based on this account from John, what one word can be substituted for spiritual sight?

The Proper Focus

As you earlier read, the main verse for this Snapshot Session is Hebrews 12:2a. Jesus helps us keep our focus on Him.

5. Carefully read each Scripture passage referenced below. Briefly describe what each says about how Jesus helps us keep our eyes fixed on Him.
 - a. Psalm 25:4–5

 - b. Psalm 119:18

 - c. Psalm 119:105

 - d. Psalm 121:1–4

 - e. Acts 2:38

 - f. Luke 22:14–20

 - g. John 15:5

 - h. Acts 2:42–47

Michael Hingson worked on the 78th floor of Tower 1 (North Tower) of the World Trade Center in New York City. Hingson was the regional sales manager and head of New York operations for Quantum/ATL, a company that provided data protection and network storage systems. On the morning of September 11, 2001, Hingson and his co-workers prepared their office for a meeting. Suddenly they heard a tremendous boom. Hingson and those with him would not know until much later that American Airlines Flight 11 had just been piloted by terrorists into the tower in which they worked, hitting between the 93rd and 99th floors. From the moment of the impact, Hingson began to pray for God's direction and guidance. God did not let him down.

Shortly after the impact, Roselle, Hingson's guide dog, awoke from her napping place under Hingson's desk. Hingson relied on Roselle to navigate for him because he is permanently and totally blind. Born prematurely in 1950, he was placed in a sealed incubator so he could breathe pure oxygen until his lungs matured. This practice had been used for years and resulted in an epidemic of blindness in premature babies born in the 1950's called retinopathy of prematurity. The extreme oxygen therapy Hingson had undergone caused the blood vessels in the back of his eye to constrict. To compensate, the eye produced a tangled mess of blood vessels that leaked blood which scarred and eventually destroyed his retina.

Hingson's parents encouraged, nurtured, and loved him. They expected him to grow and learn like any other child. He explored his California neighborhood on his own two feet, then on his bicycle, and eventually, with the assistance of a guide dog. Hingson received his first guide dog while in high school. These specially trained canines helped him all through college and into his adult life where he became a successful business man. Roselle was the fifth guide dog Hingson had owned.

After strapping on his briefcase, Hingson gripped Roselle's harness and softly commanded her, "Forward." As Tower 1 swayed and groaned from the impact of the plane, Hingson and one of his fellow workers began to direct the other workers and guests in their office to the stairwell. To reach the ground floor of Tower 1, they would have to walk down 1,463 stairs.

As they slowly maneuvered the stairs, Hingson, Roselle, and the other people could smell the pungent odor of jet fuel that had splashed over lower floors of Tower 1 when Flight 11 hit the building. The group methodically made their way down the flights of stairs. If someone became anxious, the others in the group would murmur words of encouragement and reassurance. But about halfway down, panic arose among the group. So as not to frighten Roselle, Hingson kept calm. He told one of his co-workers who walked with him, "If Roselle and I can go down the stairs, so can you." But suddenly a chilling thought came into Hingson's mind: "What will I do if the lights go out?"

After descending more stairs, another thought hit Hingson: "If the lights go out, I can be a guide. Roselle will guide me and I'll guide the others." Humorously, Hingson called out to the others that if the lights went out, he and Roselle would offer a half-price special to get everyone out of the building. Hingson's words cheered the group as they continued to maneuver the stairs.

When they reached the ground floor lobby, Hingson and Roselle were directed out of the building by law enforcement officers. They had made it out of the tower! But now they faced an even greater challenge: the collapse of Tower 2. As rocks, metal, glass, and a tremendous cloud of dust swirled and fell around them, Hingson and Roselle desperately ran. In anguish, Hingson cried out to God in prayer, “How could You get us out of the building only to have it fall on us?” As soon as he silently screamed out the question, Hingson heard God’s answer: “Don’t worry about what you cannot control. Focus on running with Roselle, and the rest will take care of itself.”

As he ran, the words of Psalm 23 sprang into Hingson’s mind. The first verse of the psalm reminded Hingson to look to God for direction. This psalm continues to remind Hingson to trust in the living God. On that terrible September day, God’s Word gave Hingson hope for the future. As his life has continued, Hingson knows he is a part of God’s family and that he will dwell in God’s house forever.

God took care of Hingson and Roselle as they ran through the falling debris of the World Trade Center. He led them to safety through the streets of Manhattan and, hours later, to their home in New Jersey.

Adapted from Thunder Dog: *The True Story of a Blind Man, His Guide Dog, and the Triumph of Trust at Ground Zero*, used by permission from Michael Hingson with Susy Flory, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2011.

6. Even though Michael Hingson cannot physically see, how does his story tell you that his eyes are fixed on Jesus?

7. How did God use Mr. Hingson as a witness of the strength and hope He gives?

Many people daily face chaotic situations. Though they may not find themselves running for their lives, they face problems and situations that are physically and emotionally draining. When we find ourselves in such situations, Jesus helps us to keep our eyes focused on Him. His power, guidance, and love as our good Shepherd leads us to safety from sin, death, and Satan.

Share with those in your small group the two lists you compiled in the “Viewfinding Activity” at the beginning of this session. Then pray together, asking Jesus to help you remove the distractions you listed and help you to focus on Him.



Wide-Angle Witness

Remain in your small group and take out the photographs you have brought. Look back at the “Photo Categories” listed in Snapshot Session 2, question 7 (“Wide-Angle Witness”). Under what category or categories do your photos fall? Write them down in the chart below.

Beginning with your first photograph, use a Bible concordance, look up the main word in its category. For example, if you have a photograph that shows mountains, look up the word “mountain” in the concordance and list in the “Bible references” column meaningful references that you find. Then look up and read each passage. Mark with a star the Bible reference that best describes God’s story as shown in your photo. Then write this entire passage in the “Bible verse selection” column. Or, if your photograph illustrates a Biblical concept such as strength, look up that word in the concordance, list the references, and proceed as described in the previous example.

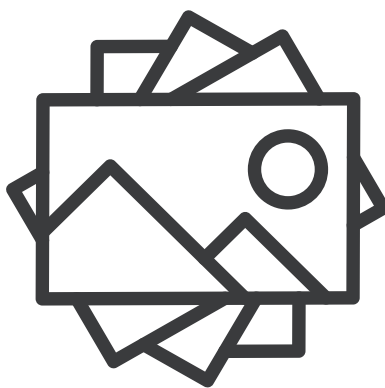
After you have gone through this procedure for each of your photographs, share your results with your small group. As you share your ideas and as you listen to the sharing of your other group members, ask yourself this question about each photograph and its selected Scripture: How clearly does the photograph and the verse help the viewer focus on God’s story of Jesus’ saving love? Tweak your selections as necessary. Be sure to list your additions in your chart.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You created for us a perfect world. We ruined Your perfection with our sins. Daily we live with sins’ consequences. We need Your help! Thank You for paying the price we owe for our sins through Your death on the cross. Thank You for conquering sin, Satan, and eternal death with Your resurrection. At all times, help us keep our eyes fixed on You. Help us turn to You first for guidance. As the “author and perfecter of our faith” give us hearts that trust in and follow Your direction. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Looking Ahead

If you are making a paper witness album, in the next session you will begin to assemble your photographs, Bible verses, and personal reflections together in your *Witness Album* or Canva, Snapfish, Shutterfly product, or phone gallery for witnessing. Before the next session, jot down some personal thoughts and recollections about each photograph that will help you tell God’s story in your album.



Snapshot 4: Composing Our Witness

[Jesus said,] “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Materials Needed:

- this study
- ESV Bible
- several ESV concordances
- participants’ personal photographs
- completed *Witness Album* (leader only)
- *Witness Albums* (one per participant)

Optional supplies for a paper witness album.

- poster board or chart paper (*Optional*)
- 4-inch by 6-inch white index cards, unruled
- various colors of cardstock paper
- fine-point pens, various colors
- laptop computer and computer printer (two or more) (*Optional*)
- scissors and/or paper cutter
- stickers, decorative punches, other miscellaneous scrapbooking supplies (*Optional*)
- glue sticks or other types of adhesive used with scrapbooking (*Optional*)

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, You are our almighty Savior and Shepherd. Daily You lead us to learn of You and serve You and others. Thank You for Your guidance and care. Give us the desire and joy to tell Your story to others. Lead us to use Your Word effectively and well. Remind us that Your Word is strong and powerful and that through it, the Holy Spirit works to open hearts to Your saving love. Bless our Bible study time and our work as we continue to develop albums that share Your story of salvation. In Your name, we pray. Amen.



Viewfinding Activity Scripture Sharers

As you greet others in your group, share with them a particular Bible passage you’ve often used when you’ve witnessed of Jesus to others. Why do you often share this specific verse?



Zooming Into God's Word **What We Proclaim**

Sing or read together the words to “Thy Strong Word” (LSB 578).

1. How do the truths shared in stanzas 1–4 of this hymn review the concepts we’ve studied so far in Snapshots 1–3?
2. For what do we ask God as we sing or say Stanza 5?
3. How does Stanza 5 relate to the main Bible verse for this session, Acts 1:8?
4. Read Isaiah 55:10–11. What does God promise in these verses?
5. Notice the focus of God’s promise in Isaiah 55:11. Compare this verse to 1 Corinthians 3:5–7. How do these verses provide confidence and comfort for you whenever you share God’s story and His Word?

A Panorama of Passages

Earlier in this session you shared with others a favorite Bible passage that you often use as you witness of Jesus to others.

6. Without naming a specific person, time, or situation, what are some joyful and/or challenging times when you've shared the passage you named?

Whenever a photographer sets up to take a photograph, the composition of the subject she wishes to capture is very important. Checking and rechecking is done to make certain that all of the image she desires to capture can be clearly seen through her camera's viewfinder and lens. She checks the background behind her subject to make sure it does not diminish or clash with the main focus of her photograph. She checks the lighting to make sure that shadows do not impair the image. (If you've ever been part of a family portrait, you know that it often takes a while to achieve the best composition for the photograph!)

Composition is also important as we witness of God's story. We want to be certain that what we say is true to God's Word. We want to make sure that our message is clear. We also want to share this message with love. God's Word is very powerful. We never want to use its truths out of context or in thoughtless ways that would lead the hearer or reader to a wrong conclusion.

7. Read 1 Peter 3:15. Why is it important to have a number of passages committed to memory or written out and carried out with you?

8. Listed below are some situations you may encounter. Match the situation with one of the listed Bible passages that would be appropriate to share at that time.

<u>Situation</u>	<u>Bible Passage</u>
a. A lonely individual ____	1. Psalm 139:13–16
b. Someone who is facing danger ____	2. 2 Thessalonians 3:3
c. An anxious mom as a child leaves for college ____	3. Nehemiah 8:10b
d. Your parents' 50th wedding anniversary ____	4. John 10:27–28
e. A baby shower ____	5. Psalm 145:3–4
f. A friend's birthday ____	6. Psalm 103:10–13
g. A person facing an uncertain future ____	7. Isaiah 43:1–2
h. An individual who has witnessed a disaster ____	8. Matthew 6:25–31, 33
i. Someone who feels guilty ____	9. John 14:6
j. Someone who does not know the way to heaven ____	10. 1 Corinthians 1:4



Wide-Angle Witness

The *Witness Album* you are assembling is one way to be prepared whenever you have a chance to share God's story with others. In Snapshot Session 3 you selected a Bible passage to pair with each of the photographs you plan to place in your album. At the end of Snapshot Session 3, you were asked to think of some personal comments you would like to add about each photo and its meaning to you as well as its connection to the Bible verse you selected.

As you've selected your photographs, you may also have identified an over-arching theme for your entire selection. Your *Witness Album* might be one of comfort, of encouragement, of friendship, or a set of images that tell of Jesus' power, forgiveness, and love. Or perhaps your album addresses several of these themes. As you work to

place your photographs in a particular order in your album, be mindful of any natural progression of the truths within God's story which they may share.

Each photograph in your *Witness Album* should be followed by a Bible verse. If you are creating a paper album, they may be either handwritten or printed with a computer and printer on a 4-inch by 6-inch rectangle of cardstock paper. If you are using your own handwriting for the Bible verses, make them stand out on the page by using a dark-colored pen or marker and your own printing, rather than cursive handwriting. If you are printing the verses with a computer, use an easily-read font that is at least 12 points in size. Use a dark and bold color of ink when you are ready to print the verses. If you are creating this on your computer or phone, type in the verse and include where it is found in the Bible.

Add your own comments about each photograph to the Bible verse cards. This may make your album especially meaningful for a family member who may view or become a future recipient of your album. As you journal, share how each photograph reminded you of a truth in God's story. You may also wish to add some background about the location of the photo and when it was taken.

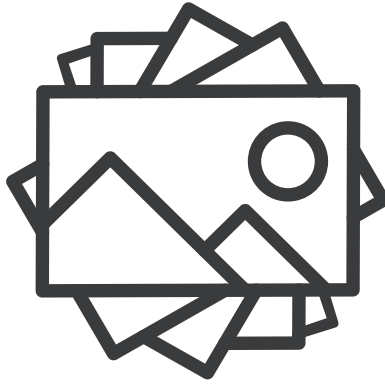
If you have chosen an online platform, follow the guidelines to insert your Bible verses to support your witness. Work to finish one-half of your *Witness Album* or Canva, Snapfish, Shutterfly product or phone gallery for witnessing by the end of this session. You will have time to complete your album in Snapshot Session 5.

Closing Prayer

Dear Jesus, You have given us an extremely important job to do: spreading the truth of Your saving love throughout the world. You have given us the Holy Spirit to help us. Thank You for the power and strength we receive from the Holy Spirit so that we can witness of You. As we continue to compose our *Witness Albums*, give us wisdom to clearly and compellingly tell Your story of salvation and hope. In Your name, we pray. Amen.

Looking Ahead

Continue to have the supplies you've provided in this session available for use in Snapshot Session 5.



Snapshot 5: Processing Our Images

Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:2–3)

Materials Needed:

- this study
- ESV Bible
- *Lutheran Service Book*
- several ESV concordances
- poster board or chart paper, markers
- masking tape
- several ESV concordances
- participants' personal photographs
- completed *Witness Album* (leader only)
- *Witness Albums* (one per participant)

Optional supplies for a paper witness album.

- 4 x 6-inch white index cards, unruled
- various colors of cardstock paper
- fine-point pens, various colors
- laptop computer and computer printer (two or more) (*Optional*)
- scissors and/or paper cutter
- stickers, decorative punches, other miscellaneous scrapbooking supplies (*Optional*)
- glue sticks or other types of adhesives used with scrapbooking (*Optional*)

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, as Psalm 118:24 proclaims, This is the day that [You] the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Every day we have is a gift from You. Every day we are blessed to tell others of the great things You have done and are doing in our lives. Give us joyful and thankful hearts, Lord, which overflow with praise for all the good things You work in our lives. Make us excited to tell others of Your goodness, so that they too may recognize all the blessings that come from You. As we study Your Word, help us to process what You want us to know, so that our witness of You to others might glorify You now and always. In Your name, we pray. Amen.



Viewfinding Activity Great Things!

As you enter the area where today's session meets, write on the provided poster board or chart paper a great thing God has done for you in the past two weeks.



Zooming Into God's Word Sharing Our Blessings

Focus on the blessings poster you and your fellow participants created. As you begin this Bible study, combine these great things God has done for you into a prayer of thanksgiving to Him. When your blessing is pointed to, on the poster, joyfully say, "Thank You, God, for (insert your blessing here.)"

God blesses all of us in many ways every day. Even those who do not recognize God as their provider are daily blessed. The Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer is, "Give us this day our daily bread." God gives daily bread to us without our prayer. We should recognize His presence in our lives and daily thank Him for His provisions.

1. How can publicly acknowledging God for our blessings provide a witness of His story?
2. When asked, "How are you?" some Christians reply, "I'm blessed!" How does such a reply open the door to further conversation concerning God's story?
3. Do any of the pictures you've included in your *Witness Album* share a God-given blessing? Share what these are with other participants.

Telling the Story of Our Greatest Blessing

The greatest blessing God has given us is faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Faith in Jesus gives us forgiveness, eternal life, comfort, peace, hope, and the promise of a home in heaven. The most important story we will ever tell is the true story that eternal salvation is found in Christ Jesus alone!

4. Contained in the appendix of the 1991 edition (2005 printing) of *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation* is a "Salvation Outline." This outline features seven Bible passages which summarize the human condition and God's gift of grace. Listed below are the seven Bible references from the outline. Look up each passage and read it carefully. Process what it says about people, our need for God, and how God blesses us. After each passage, write a short sentence which summarizes the truth of salvation it tells.
- a. John 3:16
 - b. Romans 3:22b–23
 - c. Romans 6:23
 - d. Romans 5:8
 - e. 1 Corinthians 15:3–4
 - f. Acts 16:30–31
 - g. Ephesians
5. How might you incorporate this Salvation Outline in your *Witness Album*?



Wide-Angle Witness

Take time now to continue work on your *Witness Album*. As you work, add the truths of salvation along with the Bible verses and personal comments that are a part of your album. Whether someone has been a Christian all their life or whether they have never heard God's story of salvation before, everyone needs continued assurance that they are saved through faith in Jesus.

As you process your thoughts, hone them so they are clear, concise, and true to God's Word. Pray for God's guidance and wisdom as you do this. Your finished product will be a wonderful tool to help you tell others God's story of salvation.

You will want to complete the second half of your album by the end of this session. In Snapshot Session 6 you will share your *Witness Album* with others in your group.

Closing Prayer

As a prayer to close this lesson, speak the lyrics of the song, “I Love to Tell The Story.”

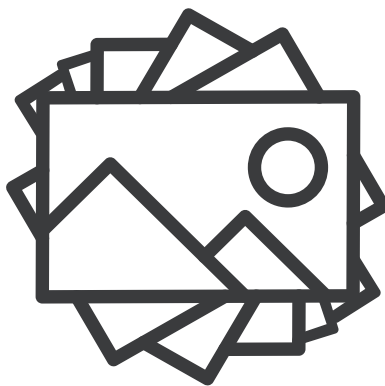
1. I love to tell the story of unseen things above, Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love. I love to tell the story, because I know it's true; It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.
2. I love to tell the story, 'tis pleasant to repeat What seems each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet. I love to tell the story, for some have never heard The message of salvation from God's own holy Word.
3. 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.

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY; 'Twill BE MY THEME IN GLORY TO TELL THE OLD, OLD STORY OF JESUS AND HIS LOVE. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

["I Love To Tell The Story," by Arabella Katherine Hankey and William Gustavus Fischer]

Looking Ahead

If you did not have time to finish your *Witness Album* during this session, take it home and complete it for Snapshot Session 6.



Snapshot 6: Exhibiting Our Albums

... so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11).

Materials Needed:

- this study
- ESV Bible
- *Lutheran Service Book*
- several ESV concordances
- participants' personal photographs
- completed *Witness Album* (leader only)
- *Witness Albums* (one per participant)

Optional supplies for a paper witness album.

- 4-inch by 6-inch white index cards, unruled
- various colors of cardstock paper
- fine-point pens, various colors
- laptop computer and computer printer (two or more) (*Optional*)
- scissors and/or paper cutter
- stickers, decorative punches, other miscellaneous scrapbooking supplies (*Optional*)
- glue sticks or other types of adhesives used with scrapbooking (*Optional*)

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, You are the Light that shines the way to our heavenly home! We are blessed to be lights for You. Help us to shine brightly with Your love in a world that is filled with darkness. Bless our photographic witnesses so that they reflect Your truth and Your light in winsome ways. Bless our time together as we study and share Your Word. In Your mighty name we pray. Amen.



Viewfinding Activity **Finishing Touches**

Use this gathering time to put any finishing touches on your *Witness Album*.



Zooming Into God's Word Shining Lights For Christ

Throughout the sessions of this study/retreat, we've examined the importance of both physical and spiritual lights in our lives. In this session we will examine a few final Bible verses which expose the light of Christ placed in our hearts and how we can shine that light into the lives of others.

1. Read Ephesians 1:13 and 2 Corinthians 4:5–6. What is it that enlightens our hearts to the salvation found in Jesus?
2. As we discussed in Snapshot Session 1, physical light is essential for photography. It is also essential for many species of physical life. Spiritual light is essential for spiritual life. In Ephesians 5:8–14, God calls us to walk as “children of light” (v. 8b). Carefully read this section of Ephesians. What does God expect of us as “children of light”?
3. What are some “unfruitful works of darkness” in our world that need to be exposed to the light of Christ? See Ephesians 5:3–6.
4. Paul describes the world as “a crooked and twisted generation” (Philippians 2:15). Therefore, we are to “shine as lights in the world.” Light can be reflected and directed. In what ways does the contents of your *Witness Album* reflect God's light (His grace and truth)?
5. In Matthew 5:14a, Jesus calls us “the light of the world.” With these words, Jesus calls us to show the world the light of His salvation through both our words and deeds. We are not to hide the light of grace and truth that we have been given in our hearts. Read Matthew 5:16. When we shine, what happens?

In its study note for Matthew 5:16, *The Lutheran Study Bible* quotes this remark of Martin Luther: “What [Jesus] calls ‘good works’ here is the exercise, expression, and confession of the teaching about Christ and faith ... Shining is the real job of believing or teaching, by which we also help others to believe” (p. 1586). We have received the glorious lifechanging, life-giving gift of the light of Christ! Take a moment now to silently pray and ask Jesus to show you the people on whom He desires you to shine with His story of salvation and love.



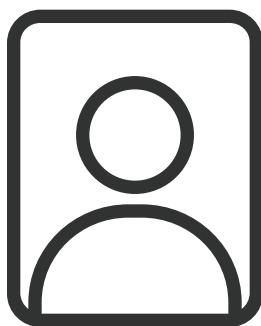
Wide-Angle Witness

Photographers often exhibit their photograph collections in galleries or in their studios. You will now exhibit your *Witness Albums* as an opportunity to practice effective shining for Jesus. Do this within the large group of study or retreat participants, so that you will have a chance to see everyone's album.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have pierced the darkness of sin, death, and Satan with the light and life of Your truth, so that we may live. Without Your Light, we would remain hopeless and helpless. Thank You, dear Savior, for powerfully conquering our enemies and for placing Your grace and truth in our hearts. In the world there are so many people who don't know You and Your life-giving Light. They are unaware of Your story of salvation or are blind to its importance. Help us shine on them for You. Help us tell Your story in a way that helps them to see their need for You. May all that we do and say reflect Your love. Be with us as we leave this place and go into the world to share Your Light. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Then sing together, “Rise, Shine, You People” (*LSB* 825). Depart in His peace as you bask in His light now and forever.



About the Author

Diane Grebing has worked as a Christian Curriculum writer for Concordia Publishing House for nearly 40 years. Throughout this time she has also completed various projects for LWML, Bethesda Lutheran Communities (now called AbleLight), and for Lutheran Heritage Foundation. She has written Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, and Lutheran School curriculum, as well as devotions for children, adults with special needs, and adult devotions and Bible studies. Diane has been an active LWML member since 1982 and has served as LWML Southern Illinois District President from 2018-2022 and on the national LWML Christian Resource Editors Committee both as a member and as chairman.

Diane and her husband, Pastor Terry Grebing, have been married since 1982. They have served in parishes in Nebraska, Missouri, and Illinois. Currently, Terry is serving as pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Renault, Illinois. They have one son, Dr. Eric Grebing, who lives in Durham, North Carolina with his wife, Dr. Laurie Grebing. Both serve in the field of education. Besides writing, Diane enjoys counted cross stitch, reading working in the garden and traveling.



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