



*A four-session
small group
study for growing
disciples*



STUDY

Living Faith in Daily Life

a small group Bible study experience

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STUDY

Living Faith in Daily Life

A small group Bible study experience

Study is a mark of discipleship. It is one of the seven faith practices highlighted in the ELCA-wide *Call to Discipleship*.

"The regular study of the Bible and books that help to enliven its message (e.g., Luther's catechisms, commentaries and other study resources) is a key way the disciple practices loving and knowing God. Study happens privately through personal Bible study and a regular devotional time. Study also happens publicly as families and friends learn together, in small groups, and through larger gatherings of formal study and worship. The maturing disciple attends to "study" in both private and communal contexts. Through reading, meditating and the study of Scripture, the lively word of God becomes active in the lives of believers. For thousands of years, the words of Jesus, the teachings of the prophets and apostles, and the stories of God's people have revealed God's heart and hope for the world and each one of us. The Holy Spirit inspires us through Scripture to see ourselves as we are and as God would have us become. Through the Bible we come to understand how God works in the world, for the world and through people like us."

—From *Living Faith Congregational Planning Guide* © 2000 ELCA, admin. Augsburg Fortress.
Available online at www.elca.org/init/teachthefait/



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Produced by the Christian Education team of the Division for Congregational Ministries. Multiple copies of this resource can be ordered by calling Augsburg Fortress, 800/328-4648 and asking for item code 6-0001-6915-0 \$1.25 each, plus shipping.

This resource and further support materials are available at www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources

About this study

This is an introductory level resource. It is designed for those adults who have little Bible knowledge and minimal experience with small groups. Each session offers a starting exploration into a different approach to Bible study – oral reflection, critical reflection, theological reflection and storytelling. Although divided into four sessions, some sessions could easily be divided and carried over for another session for a total of six to eight sessions. The study could be used with those new to the faith, as a tool to introduce the practice of study to a congregation, or as a resource to expand a congregation's approach to adult learning. Additional learning opportunities, as well as more in-depth offerings, could be planned for those who complete this basic course. Resources for going deeper are at www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources



Advance preparation

To facilitate a successful small group experience, attend to the following needs in advance of the first session:

- Order a copy of this study, *Study: Living Faith in Daily Life*, for each participant. (6-0001-6915-9, \$1.25 each, plus shipping.)
- Provide a small notebook for the personal reflections and journal exercises. Remember extra pencils, pens, and Bibles.
- Review this study in advance of the group's gathering to determine which resources to have on hand for each session.
- Plan for refreshments.

How to use this course

This course will work best in a small group of 7 to 12 people. Such a group can focus on sharing experiences and insights instead of simply mastering content. One person can lead the group or you could rotate leadership among participants. Suggestions for the leader are found in small boxes throughout this resource. The leader's task in this course is to encourage discussion and action, not to teach content. The goal for this study is to create a learning environment that is Christ-centered, biblically based, accepting and conducive to personal sharing. Each session of *Study* is divided into three sections:

Gathering

This is a time to warm up through prayer and personal sharing. Questions set the stage for the theme and encourage personal sharing that builds group identity and fosters supportive relationships. Allow time for laughter and genuine community building.

Growing

A time to study the Bible, reflect through story and exercises, and journal individual and group discoveries.

Going

This is a time to imagine the possibilities for faith sharing between sessions, to pray and to commit to further prayer and reflection. Depending on the length of group conversation, sessions can run between 50 and 90 minutes. Ideal settings for this study include participant's homes, church, or any comfortable room conducive to open, honest sharing.



Session 1

We Study to Hear

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each person in turn to share one of the following. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Share your name and the number of Bibles there are in your house. If you have a family Bible, tell others where it is located and how your family uses it.
2. Share one question, concern, or fear you have about the Bible or this Bible study.

Let's Pray (or Sing!)

Pray or sing together the words of "Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil" (With One Voice 713).

Lord, let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your Word.

Lord, let my heart be good soil, where love can grow and peace is understood.

When my heart is hard, break the stone away.

When my heart is cold, warm it with the day.

When my heart is lost, lead me on your way.

Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart, Lord, let my heart be good soil. (Amen)

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Changing Church, Inc.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

The pastor wrote about it in every church newsletter, worship bulletin and e-mail devotion. She preached it from the pulpit. She told her colleagues and friends. She mentioned it to everyone who would listen. It was her vision, her hope, and her delight. "I have a recurring dream," she said. "I dream that by the time I

retire in 20 years our church will be 100 percent passionate for biblical literacy."

Her dream was that every disciple would fall in love with God's word. They would know it so well, they would no longer need to teach it to one another. She dreamed of people wearing out their Bible from using it so much. She dreamed of people learning many of the biblical stories by heart, and then telling those stories to those who had never heard. She dreamed of a time when people in sickness and distress would comfort each other by speaking of God's mighty acts. She dreamed of a day when the Bible would truly act as the norm and authority of the church's life and faith.

Hers was not a naive dream, however. She knew that there were many reasons why biblical knowledge was not a priority in the church. She talked with the members of her congregation and discovered several obstacles to biblical literacy today. Parishioners told her: I do not want to participate in a Bible study because...

I do not know much about the Bible.

I do not know how to find passages in the Bible.

I do not like anything "touchy-feely".

I do not have a good Bible.

I do not have enough time.

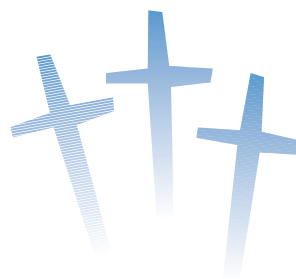
I do not think I can understand the Bible.

I don't know anyone in the study.

Still, she dreamed. And, she worked, in her congregation, to make it so.

—Adapted from "Biblical Literacy: Moving from a Dream to Reality," by Pr. Jane E. Kunzie-Brunner, *Lutheran Partners*, Jan/Feb. 2001.

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Discuss as a group.

1. What do you think of the pastor's dream? Is it a realistic dream? Is it a dream you share? Explain.
2. What do you think of the obstacles the pastor discovered about why people do not wish to be part of a Bible study? Which of the obstacles have kept you away from Bible study? What obstacles would you say keep most people away?
3. Does your participation in this study mean those obstacles were removed, adjusted or somehow lessened? Explain.

BIBLE FOCUS

Oral Reflection approach to Luke 2:1-20

Simplicity, periods of silence, participation by all group members, and the experience of equality characterize the Oral Reflection approach, as each individual encounters and listens to God speaking through the Bible. In this study, the Scripture will be read or told three times, if possible by three different people. Invite participants to listen, and not to follow along in their Bibles.

As the story is told for the first time, listen for a word or phrase that catches your attention. After a brief time of silence, recall the word or phrase that caught your attention and share it with the group.

As the story is told for a second time, listen for how the passage is speaking to your life today. After a brief period of silence, share how the passage speaks to your life today.

As the story is told for the third time, listen for what God may want you to do, or be, or change this week. After a brief silence, share what God is calling you to do through this passage

The study may end with a final reading of the story or a prayer lifting up the responses participants shared. After the Oral Reflection study, discuss the following as a group.

As you reflect on your experience with the Oral Reflection approach to Study, share with others:

What did you like?

What surprised you?

What are the benefits of this approach to study?

Where or how do you imagine this approach could be used in your congregation?

As you have time, you may try the Oral Reflection approach with other texts you select or are suggested by participants.

JOURNAL TIME

Invite participants to read the following Bible study assumptions prior to the next class, and to record their thoughts about the questions in their journals.

The Bible is the church's book

While individuals are encouraged to read and study the Bible, the ongoing practice of study always belongs to the community of faith. Individuals may find personal inspiration, guidance and comfort in the Bible, but the Bible is intended for more than personal use. God caused the Bible to be written for the church's learning. The purpose of the Bible is the equipping of God's people for their witness in the world.

The Bible is a living Word

The practice of study involves more than simply knowing what the Bible says. It involves listening to the Bible's amazing stories, wondering about its astonishing claims and exploring with others what these things might mean for us today. The Bible is an active Word that brings us face to face with the living God. The study of this living Word often produces new insights and varied understandings. Through this living Word, God continues to call into being a new people.

The Bible is a storybook

The Bible tells amazing stories of what God has done, is doing, and will do. The Bible tells stories of giants, floods, scoundrels, exiles, prodigals, dreams, jailbreaks, and earthquakes. The Bible opens the canvas of our

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Session 1 *continued*

lives to possibilities beyond the purely factual. The various biblical writers wrote stories as a way to bear faithful witness to God's actions in the world. As we listen to these stories today, we hear the Word of God address us, leaving us breathless and spent, dependent on God, and inspired to respond with new stories.

- What do you notice about these Bible study assumptions? What would you change or add?
- What assumptions about the Bible do you have? Where did they come from? If they have changed, how have they changed?
- Share an example of how an understanding of a Bible story may have changed or been altered in your life.

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home.

Going

Final Thoughts

Encourage all to complete the Small Group Covenant. Suggest that participants read the covenant and sign it prayerfully. The covenant is meant to be a statement of intention, seeking God's blessing.

Small Group Covenant

1. I commit to being a part of this group for each of our meetings.
2. I will pray each day for each small group member by name.
3. I will treat all that is shared in the group as confidential.
4. I will invest time each week to pray reflect and write on the "journal time" text.
5. I will do one "action step" this week.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Action Steps

Invite participants to select from one the following activities, or to create an activity themselves, that they will commit to do this week. (See Small Group Covenant item five above.)

- I will read and reflect on next Sunday's Gospel lesson before I go to worship.
- I will begin a daily Bible reading routine.
- I will ask others in my family, at work, or at church what they think of the Bible.
- I will read from beginning to end one of the four Gospels.
- I will count the number of Bibles in my home or at church.
- I will see how many Bible references I can discover in the worship service.
- I will listen to a recording or watch a video presentation of a book or story from the Bible.
- I will...

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray, or ask a volunteer to pray, the following prayer aloud or speak another prayer of your choosing.

Blessed Lord, you speak to us through the Holy Scriptures. Grant that we may hear, read, respect, learn, and make them our own in such a way that the enduring benefit and comfort of the Word will help us grasp and hold the blessed hope of everlasting life, given us through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

©1978 Lutheran Book of Worship, admin. Augsburg Fortress, p.47.

91 percent of all U.S. households own at least one Bible. The typical household owns three.

42 percent of adults in the United States read the Bible during a typical week—not including when at church.

—George Barna, 2002

Among Bible readers, the average time spent reading the Bible during an entire week is fifty-two minutes or about 10 minutes a day. —George Barna, 1997

Session 2

We Study to Learn

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each person in turn to participate in the following sharing activity. You might start with your own sharing.

According to a recent survey of congregations, Christians today hold many views of the Bible. When a sample group of Protestant and Catholic worshippers were presented with the following six general statements of the Bible, one choice was most identified as representing their views. As you read the statements, select the one that comes closest to your view of the Bible. Select only one and be prepared to share your answer. (*Survey responses are listed at end of this session.)

1. The Bible is the Word of God, to be taken literally word for word.
2. The Bible is the Word of God, to be interpreted in light of its historical and cultural context.
3. The Bible is the Word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the church's teachings.
4. The Bible is not the word of God, but contains God's Word to us.
5. The Bible is not the Word of God but is a valuable book.
6. The Bible is an ancient book with little value today.
7. Don't know.

You may want to allow time for conversation about participants' journal writing and action steps taken.

Let's Pray (or sing!)

Pray or sing together the words of "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word" (LBW 230).

Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from your Son
And bring to nought all he has done.

O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth;
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life. (Amen)

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group.

Betty didn't wait for the opening prayer before she started speaking. "I'm confused," she declared to the Martha Circle. The other seven women looked at her in silence. Sally was all set to pray, but could tell from Betty's tone that the prayer should wait. "Confused about what?" Sally asked. "Did you ever read Genesis?" There was silence. Betty picked up her cup of tea and waited for a response. The other women weren't sure if they should answer. "Did you?" Betty asked again. "Well, I did." She didn't wait for anyone else to answer this time. "And I'm confused!" "Did you know that there are two creation accounts? And they're very different. They can't both be right. I thought the Bible was true." There was more silence.

"Look here." Betty starts flipping to Genesis in her Bible. "It's suppose to say that God talks and things happen," she declares, searching for a passage. "In one place it says something like..." she tries to recall, still thumbing through the pages. "...God speaks and

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Session 2

creates man and woman." Skipping now to the passage that upset her, she turns her Bible around so everyone can see. "But look at this," she cries in a frustrated tone. "Here God gets down into the dirt to make the first human. Listen!" She reads from Genesis 2. "The Lord God took a hand full of soil and made a man. God breathed life into the man and put him in the garden." "So, which is it?" Betty asked the group. "Did God make us out of dirt or out of his words?"

Sally was the first to speak up. She knew that Betty was new to the church. She had heard her confusion in other situations. "Well, I don't think either story is an eyewitness account, Betty. I'm not certain either story is about *how* creation took place. I do know that both tell us *who* was responsible for creation. These ancient stories are there to remind us that God is Lord of all of life, that God is creator of all, even us." Sally stopped there.

Discuss as a group.

1. What are the Bible passages that you, like Betty, have some difficulty understanding, accepting or reconciling with other Bible passages, or even with what you know to be true about life or the way the world works?
2. What is your experience studying the language and culture of the Bible? How does knowing if a passage is a parable or lament, a poem or a letter help in studying the Bible?
3. How is it possible for a Bible passage or story to have more than one meaning? Does knowing what a Bible story or book meant to the original hearers, exhaust all possible meaning for us today? Can we know for certain what a passage means? Explain your answers.

BIBLE FOCUS

Critical Reflection approach to Luke 15:11-32

It will be helpful to supply Bible study resources appropriate to the critical approach in advance of the study. Refer to the following steps for what resources will be needed. Consider having several translations, concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, literary guides, and electronic Bible study resources available during this session. These tools are described under Journal Time in this session. Encourage participants to respond to the critical reflection questions.

The *Critical Reflection* approach to Bible study is concerned with investigating the historical and cultural setting of the events described in the Bible. Critical methods can be an important and helpful aid to Bible study, providing a grasp of the grammatical and historical sense of the Bible. The great differences in culture and society between the biblical world and our world are highlighted, along with evidence of how a passage has been understood by God's people in various situations and times. This can lead to a greater appreciation of what these stories might mean for us today.

The *Critical Reflection* approach involves the following six steps of study.

1. Read or tell Luke 15:11-32 (or a story of your choosing) out loud to the entire group.
2. Identify the type of writing. *What is the literary form of this story? Is this story to be taken literally or figuratively? Why do you think so?*
3. Describe the historical situation. Use a Bible dictionary or Bible commentary to get clues. *Who is speaking? Who is the audience? What is the situation for the writer? What is the occasion? What is the intention of the passage?*
4. Search the original meaning. Study the words, symbols and images to understand what the writer may have intended. *How do you think the first hearers understood the story?*

5. Apply the message to life today. *What contemporary issues and concerns seem to be related to the story? What does this story have to say about being a disciple today?*

6. Create a personal statement. *What difference might this story make in your life? How might you express your response in words or in movement or in art?*

As you reflect on your experience with the *Critical Reflection* approach to study, share with others:

What did you like?

What surprised you?

What are the benefits of this approach to study?

Where or how do you imagine this approach could be used in your congregation?

JOURNAL TIME

Invite participants to read the following paragraphs prior to the next class, and to record their thoughts and questions in their journals. Consider having available copies of next Sunday's Bible lessons to study with the following tools. Again, it may be helpful to have examples of the study tools (perhaps from the church library) available for participants to look at and discuss.

When studying the Bible it is helpful not only to consider the written words but also the literary forms, historical and cultural contexts, Biblical concepts and common interpretations of the passages and books. Many different kinds of study tools are available today to assist readers in engaging the worlds and words of the Bible. The follow is a partial list of Bible study tools that can be helpful in finding new and rich insights from the Bible.

Bible dictionary. A Bible dictionary or theological handbook will have an alphabetical listing of articles on biblical ideas, events, people, and other topics, along with their meaning and background.

Bible atlas. A Bible atlas is not just a collection of maps of the Bible lands. A good historical atlas provides information on changing boundaries, geographical features of the land, major movements or peoples, and a feeling for distance, elevation, and climate conditions.

Bible commentary. A commentary is a book written by someone who has taken a lot of time studying some part of the Bible very carefully. A commentary provides information on who, when, to whom, and what of the biblical texts, as well as suggesting possible meanings and even applications.

Bible concordance. A concordance is an alphabetical listing of all the major words in the Bible. It will tell you how often the word appears and the passages in which the word is found.

Parallel Bible. A parallel Bible is a Bible that prints several translations side-by-side in columns. The resource can be used to compare how different people have understood the same original text.

Literary guide. A literary guide is a resource that helps Bible readers identify the various types of literature in the Bible. Some of the literary forms in the Bible include laws and rules, history and narratives, poetry and songs, wisdom and proverbs, gospels, letters, prayers, and parables.

In addition, your Bible should be a reliable translation and not a paraphrase. Also, your Bible will be most useful if it is annotated, that is, if it has footnotes that give you information on related Bible verses, other possible translations of difficult words or phrases, and details useful for understanding the verses you are studying.

A **paraphrase** is a restatement of a passage in similar but less exact words, often used to clarify meaning. A **translation** is a written communication in a second language having the same meaning as the written communication in the first language.

Session 2 *continued*

- What is your experience with these Bible study tools? Are there others you would add?
- Do you think study tools make it easier to understand the Bible or more confusing?
- Share an example of how you have appreciated the information made available through one or more of the Bible study tools.

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home.

Going

Final Thoughts

Although study tools can help us discover sources, literary forms, and historical situations behind passages, their chief usefulness is in helping us hear God's Word. Study tools and scholarly books are not meant to take the place of actually reading the Bible. Rather, they can help put us in touch with the first readers and the Word, which the Bible writers spoke to them. While, it may not be possible to know with certainty what any author intended with the words we have in the passage, we do know that the Bible is rich with possibilities for us, some that may exceed whatever the author intended. The Bible has an inexhaustible depth. It is a living and active Word!

Action Steps

Invite participants to select from one of the following activities, or to create an activity themselves, that they will commit to do this week.

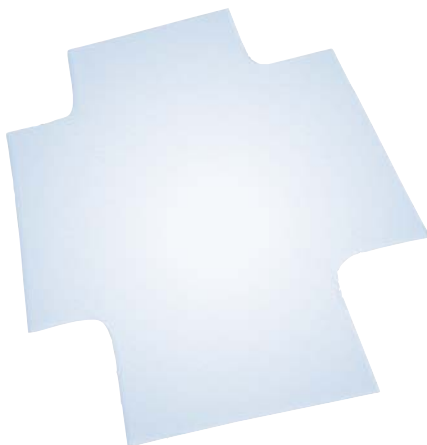
- I will use two of the Bible study tools to study next Sunday's Gospel lesson.
- I will begin a daily Bible Reading routine.
- I will write a brief devotion for Lent or Advent and share it with the congregation.
- I will see how many Bible references I can discover in the worship service.
- I will listen to a recording or watch a video presentation of a book or story from the Bible.
- I will...

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, you have seen us in our struggles with the enemies, dangers, and fears of life. You have been with us this hour as we sought new skills and dedication in using the Bible that can help us in those struggles. Guide us as we leave this study time, and by your Spirit inspire us to face life this week with confidence and hope in your promises. Amen.

Answer to survey questions listed in the Gathering section of this session on p. 7: 1. 28%, 2. 20%, 3. 42%, 4. 4%, 5. 1%, 6. 0%, 7. 3%

—From *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations* ©2001 Westminster John Knox Press. Used by permission.



Session 3

We Study to Believe

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each person in turn to answer the following questions. You might start with your own sharing.

1. How is the Bible currently used in the life and practice of your congregation? What is satisfying about this pattern? What could be improved?
2. In what ways does studying the Bible reshape our hearts, minds, bodies and spirits? If possible, share an experience from your life.

You may want to allow time for conversation about participants' journal entries and action steps taken.

Let's Pray (or sing!)

Pray or sing together the words of "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage" (LBW 239).

God's Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor:
Through life it guides our way;
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant while time shall last
Your Church may hold it fast
Throughout all generations. (Amen)

This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life. (section 2.03.)

—From the ELCA Constitution, Bylaws & Continuing Resolutions © 2001 ELCA, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

"What are you doing here?" Mark asks Dan. He is surprised to see him at the Soup Kitchen site with the others from church. "Well," Dan's words come slowly. "I was convicted last week." "Convicted?" Mark says inquisitively, moving towards the pantry. "Yah," Dan comes back. "I was sitting in the adult forum on Sunday. We were talking about the gospel lesson for that day. And for the first time, I heard God speaking to me." "What do you mean?" Mark asks, as he hands Dan several bags of groceries to put on the table. "Well, you know that story where Jesus thanks people for visiting him when he was sick and in prison, and giving him food when he was hungry?" "Yes, that's the story of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25," Mark says as he continued to fill the paper bags with groceries. "Yah, that story, I guess. Anyway, as others were talking I realized that I see Jesus hungry almost everyday when I walk from the subway to the factory, and I've never given him so much as a piece of bread."

Mark finishes with the bags, and, half-listening, motions Dan to follow him as he moves to set up the tables. "I don't get it," Mark comments casually, with his mind attentive to the room preparations at hand. "You never gave Jesus any food?" Dan stops in the middle of the fellowship hall, looks Mark straight in the eyes, and says out loud for the first time. "I've never really felt very connected with church. I know, I'm there most Sundays. But it's really only to keep things together at home. It always seemed too heady for me, too intellectual, too other worldly. But that Sunday, I heard Jesus call me to *do* something, to use my arms and legs to help Jesus." Dan silently turns his head down to the floor as he opens and sets up another folding chair, thinking he may have said too much.

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Session 3 *continued*

“Sure,” Mark says, opening and setting up the last two folding chairs. “It’s good for these folks that our church helps at this Soup Kitchen. I can’t imagine what it must be like for them.” He walks to the kitchen, ready to start another task in preparation for the arrival of guests. Dan slowly follows him into the kitchen, wondering if Mark has heard a word that he said, and feeling grateful that he found a way to feed Jesus.

Discuss as a group.

1. Was there ever a time when you were “convicted” as Dan was? Explain. Are you aware of any individual actions or congregational ministries that are inspired by biblical stories or passages? Describe the connection.
2. What are the opportunities for Bible study in your congregation? Have you heard stories of why individuals participate in your congregation’s education ministry? What would help facilitate the sharing of such stories?
3. How does your congregation offer a balance between learning opportunities and service opportunities? How does your congregation encourage both intellectual pursuits and social ministry activities? How would you describe the ideal relationship between knowing about Jesus and following Jesus?

BIBLE FOCUS

Critical Reflection approach to Luke 15:11-32

Simplicity, periods of silence, participation by all group members, and the experience of equality characterize the Theological Reflection approach, as each individual encounters and listens to God speaking through the Bible. In this study, the scripture will be read or told three times, if possible by three different people. Invite participants to listen, and not to follow along in their Bibles.

1. Listen as someone reads Romans 3:19-28 (or another passage of your choosing) out loud. Discuss what the passage tells about God. If helpful, make a list on newsprint or on a blackboard.

2. Read the passage a second time. Discuss what the passage tells about people and the relationship between people. Again, if helpful, make a list of responses on newsprint or on a blackboard.

3. Read the passage aloud a third time. Discuss what the passage tells about the relationship between God and people. *How might people living in different circumstances or in different cultures understand the passage’s message? How does the passage call us both as individuals and as a community to change? What would God have us do?*

4. Read the passage aloud, quietly, as a closing prayer.

As you reflect on your experience with the Theological Reflection approach, share with others:

What did you like?

What surprised you?

What are the benefits of this approach to study?

Where or how do you imagine this approach could be used in your congregation?

JOURNAL TIME

Invite participants to read the following theological principles prior to the next class, and to record their thoughts about the questions in their journals.

We study the Bible in light of Christ.

The Bible points beyond itself to a person, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the center of the Bible. The Old Testament is the preparation for Jesus; the New Testament is the manifestation of Jesus. The pivotal events in the Bible are the life, teaching, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. All of scripture is related to Christ and finds its significance in that relationship.



Going

We study the Bible in light of justification by grace.

We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus, not by how we feel, or having the right experience, or what we accomplish. Because of Christ, all are accepted into the community of God's people. The central message of the Bible is simple and grand. God loves us, forgives us, and makes us the church.

We study the Bible listening for law and gospel.

As we study certain passages, we may hear God's judgments for the world and us. This is called the law. We experience the law when we are confronted with our sin. As we study other passages, we may hear God's love, grace, and promises for the world and us. That is called the gospel. We experience the gospel when we are overwhelmed by God's grace.

We study the Bible with the Bible.

The best resource for Bible study is the Bible. A panoramic view of the biblical story can provide balance for difficult passages, stories, and themes. To ignore the biblical story is to run the risk of taking passages out of context and reducing the Bible to a collection of moral laws or a holy rulebook. Scripture must be used to interpret scripture.

- What do you notice about these theological principles? What would you change or add?
- Do you think it is possible that the same Bible passage or story can act as both law and gospel? How?
- What study principles do you have? Where did they come from? If they have changed, how have they changed?
- Share an example of how study principles helped you make sense of a difficult passage or story.

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home.

Martin Luther once said that the Bible is the cradle that brings us Jesus of Nazareth.

Final Thoughts

From the beginning, God has been determined to communicate with God's people. God first spoke in the swirling chaos and the Word came into being. Throughout history, God's Word has been heard on the lips of people who have reminded us that our God is a God of justice and mercy. And in Jesus, we hear God's ultimate Word of forgiveness and love – God's grace. God continues to speak to us through the Bible, not so we may believe *that*, but so we may believe *in* Jesus Christ. Studying the Bible means finding Christ in it.

Action Steps

Invite participants to select from one the following activities, or to create an activity themselves, that they will commit to do this week.

- I will look for theological principles evident in next Sunday's Gospel lesson.
- I will explore what actions God maybe calling me to engage in through Bible stories.
- I will read a Bible study guide or other resources available in the congregation's library.
- I will see how many theological principles I can find expressed in our congregation's worship service.
- I will write a story or poem or drama to share with others based on a Bible story.
- I will...

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, gracious Lord, pour out your Holy Spirit upon your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in your Word, protect and comfort us in all temptations, defend us against all our enemies and grant us your saving peace; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

—Prayer for Reformation Day, ©1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, admin. Augsburg Fortress, p.36.

Session 4

We Study to Tell

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each person to answer the following questions and to share their answers with one or two other persons. You might start by reading all four of the questions out loud.

1. Where were you living between ages seven and twelve...and what were the winters like?
 2. How was your home heated during that time?
 3. What was the center of warmth in your life when you were a child? (This can be a place in your house, a time of year, a person, etc.)
 4. When did God become a "warm" person to you...and how did it happen?
-

You may want to allow time for conversation about participants' journal entries and action steps taken.

Let's Pray (or sing!)

Pray or sing together the words of Almighty God, Your Word is Cast (LBW 234).

Almighty God, your Word is cast
Like seed into the ground;
Now let the dew of heav'n descend
And righteous fruits abound.
Let not the sly satanic foe
This holy seed remove,
But give it root in ev'ry heart
To bring forth fruits of love. (Amen)

Growing


Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud. You might read this material ahead of time and simply share it with the group.

At a gathering of supporters, Lutheran Vespers speaker Pastor Walt Wangerin urged his listeners, "Tell your children and grandchildren about your childhood, and ask your own parents and grandparents about theirs."

Wangerin uses his experience as an author and storyteller to talk about his role as a grandfather, and his relationships with his parents and grandparents. He laments the opportunity missed by many to share childhood experiences with their children and grandchildren. "Most people know little about the childhood experiences of their parents and grandparents," he says. "We must talk. We have to talk. If we don't, these childhood experiences will be lost forever."

Wangerin encouraged his audience to talk about their own childhood and to ask parents and grandparents what childhood was like for them. "How can we not tell our grandchildren what their ancestors fought for and worshipped over?"

Discuss as a group.

1. What is your experience with telling your children and grandchildren about your childhood? What is your experience with asking your parents and grandparents about their childhood?
 2. Tell a story from your childhood about a family worshipping tradition or something your family thought was worth fighting over.
- 

BIBLE FOCUS

A Storytelling approach to Mark 5:1-20

Listening to the passage, learning it by heart, and telling it to others characterize the Storytelling approach. The passage is heard twice. Invite participants to listen, and not to follow along in their Bibles.

1. Read or tell Mark 5:1-20 (or another story of your choosing) aloud. Read or tell the story again. This time phrase by phrase, with participants repeating each phrase after you.
2. Invite the group to tell the story in their own words. One person may begin and others can add portions, until the entire story is told. Don't worry about what is omitted or forgotten.
3. Distribute copies of the story. Focus on the structure.
4. Tell the story again as a group, according to the breaks and transitions. Encourage participants to close their eyes and visualize the story as they tell it.
5. Explore the feelings and characters in the story. *When have you experienced feelings like this? What are the characters like? Do you know people like that?*
6. Investigate information about the passage's original context in order to make sense of the story. Refer to any of the Bible study tools mentioned in session two.
7. Tell the story again as a group.
8. Invite individuals to tell the story to the group. Encourage them to stand, move around and to feel the story as they tell it.

JOURNAL TIME

Invite participants to read the following storytelling factors, and to record their thoughts about the questions in their journal.

Storytelling is the first language of God's people.

The gospel was originally a storytelling tradition. Before the stories were silent ink on paper, they were living breath and sound. God was experienced in this oral culture as a character in the story. Those who were part of Israel's storytelling tradition shaped the stories of Jesus in the New Testament. All these faith stories were written down so that they could be retold, reheard, and relearned.

The biblical story is ours for the telling.

Persons who thought in story wrote most of the Bible. They wrote to announce the good news that an initiative fashioned in heaven had become visible on earth. There is a living word in every story that comes to life anew every time it is told. Telling stories makes our traditions come alive as they connect us with customs, beliefs, and celebrations from our past and present.

Bible stories are open-ended.

Biblical stories are not told to persuade, foster understanding, prove a doctrinal position, or to manipulate the listener into agreement. Rather, they are structured to invite response, to invoke, to capture the listener's imagination. As we tell these stories, we find echoes of our own struggles. We find our stories in the wider stories of the Bible. As the stories become more deeply part of us, we discover more fully the faithfulness of God in our own lives. A feast of stories in the Bible waits to form new disciples, set hearts burning, and open once-hopeless eyes to the reality of the risen Christ.



STUDY *Living Faith in Daily Life*

a small group Bible study experience

Session 4 *continued from page 15*

- What do you notice about these *storytelling factors*?
- What would you change or add?
 - It has been said that the Bible's truth is revealed in story more than in an assemblage of wooden facts. In what way would you say this is so?
 - Share an example of how a story from the Bible has made a difference in your life and faith.

Journal work may be started during class time and completed later at home.

Going

Final thoughts

Storytelling is once again becoming the primary language of communication. In our digital culture, television, film, and the Web are used to tell various kinds of stories. Such digital storytelling presents a challenge to the church: how ought we integrate the world of electronic media into the church's ongoing ministry of

worship and education? Whenever the Gospel narratives are faithfully told—face-to-face, in print or on the screen—the living Christ is present there in the midst of them. Tell the story. And if you must, use words!

Action Steps

Invite participants to select from one the following activities, or to create an activity themselves, that they will commit to do this week.

- I will listen to the gospel lesson as story in the worship service.
- I will look for Bible stories or themes retold in movies, popular songs or TV programs.
- I will tell a Bible story this week to a friend or family member.
- I will explore way to tell the gospel story with electronic technology.
- I will start or join another adult study group.
- I will...

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious God, though your ways and your truth are mysterious to us, enlighten our minds. Though we do not always understand how you accomplish what you do, work your grace in us and through us. We thank you for the unbroken chain of faithful servants who have told of your marvelous deeds through the ages. Help us to see the Bible as your great treasure in earthen vessels. Help us to obey your call to faithful study of your Holy Word. Amen.

LIVING FAITH • ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship

