

**Study Guide for *How Lutherans Interpret the Bible***  
By Jessicah Krey Duckworth

**Introduction**

“With care” is how I might describe Mark Allen Powell’s approach to seven important questions about Lutherans and the Bible. He does not prescribe “the Lutheran way” to read the Bible. Nor does he dismiss the way you may have come to understand the Bible. Instead, Powell presents a range of options for interpreting the Bible in particularly Lutheran ways. You will find some of these ways helpful. You may find some of these ways not as helpful.

You are invited to explore these Lutheran ways of interpreting the Bible through this seven session video series. Through Powell’s rich discussions you will discover answers to questions you have always had about the Bible. One question I’ve always had is how we determine right and wrong as a church. In session five Powell emphasizes carefully Lutheran ways to discern when a biblical law should or should not apply to a situation. To those of us who have strong opinions on the significant social issues of our time he also provides biblical counsel to consider how our opinions have been shaped and formed consciously or not by the biblical witness and tradition. Throughout Powell’s presentation he enhances his discussion by using Biblical texts such as the Beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel or the parable of the Prodigal Son to offer concrete examples and practical application. In viewing all of these seven sessions, Powell will also answer questions you have never thought about. I have always been proud of our Lutheran commitment to dialogue on the important social matters of our time but I have never asked why. I now have a clearer picture of why dialogue plays such an important role in matters of biblical interpretation for Lutherans.

The study guide which accompanies this DVD series has been created to encourage your responses and reactions to the material presented by Powell. In addition to the study guide, Powell has created handouts for many of the sessions which should be passed out prior to viewing the video.

- Session 1: ELCA Constitution
- Session 2: Lutheran Buzzwords
- Session 3: Interpreting Scripture
- Session 5: Binding & Loosing

- Session 7: Reflecting on Scripture

The **curriculum plan** for each session includes learning goals and preparation information for the facilitators. It is very important for the facilitators to review the learning goals and watch the video in advance so that the facilitators can select appropriate questions and tailor the discussion to meet the needs of those who gather for the conversation. The formats are suggested and it is possible one activity may be useful for one context in a way that another might not. In all cases prayers and hymns are taken from the ELCA's new worship hymnal, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. If your congregation is not using the new hymnal you may need to choose alternate prayers or hymns, or gain copyright information to make photocopies for the group. The facilitators' preparation information also reminds the facilitators to involve others by inviting one person to be the host while inviting another to provide refreshments.

This study guide offers three suggested formats for congregational use. The **sixty-minute format** might be useful for a Sunday morning or weekday evening adult Bible study class. This format includes in addition to viewing the video, a welcome and opening devotion, discussion questions and a closing for the session. The **ninety-minute format** might be useful in a small group setting in the church or in homes or for a weekday evening adult Bible study class. This format is similar to the sixty-minute format but adds an opportunity for Bible Study. The Bible Study could happen prior to watching the video. In this case the biblical study would prepare the participants for the theme of the session and provide a biblical experience to reflect upon during the video and respond to during the discussion questions which follow the video. A second option is to place the Bible Study after the discussion questions as an opportunity to put into practice some of the main points Powell discusses in the video. The ninety-minute format also includes a reflection/action opportunity which asks participants to respond to the video in creative ways. Sometimes this activity needs extra supplies which are listed for the facilitators to prepare ahead of time.

The third suggested format is for **congregational leadership**. If a congregation's church council or a Christian Education team wanted to make this video series a part of their devotion prior to the meeting agenda this format suggests viewing the video followed with discussion questions tailored to the congregational leader. This format is highly recommended for those congregations

interested in preparing leaders to facilitate a congregation-wide initiative such as the ELCA's Book of Faith Initiative.

### **Three Suggested Formats and Curriculum Plan**

#### **60 minute Adult Study: Seven Sessions\***

- ∞ Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes)
- ∞ View Video (20-30 minutes)
- ∞ Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)
- ∞ Closing (10 minutes)

#### **90 minute Adult Study: Seven Sessions\***

- ∞ Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes)
- ∞ *Optional Biblical Study (20 minutes)*
- ∞ View Video (20-30 minutes)
- ∞ Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)
- ∞ *Optional Biblical Study (20 minutes)*
- ∞ *Reflection/Action (10 minutes)*
- ∞ Closing (10 minutes)

#### **30-45 minute Committee Starters for Congregational Leadership: Seven Sessions\***

- ∞ View Video (20-30 minutes)
- ∞ Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

*\* Please note that every session can work by itself and participants do not have to be present at every session to contribute.*

# Adult Study: Seven Sessions

## Curriculum Plan: Session I – The Word of God

The Bible is the Word of God; it tells us what God wants to say to us. In this first session Mark Allen Powell explores the Bible, a living Word, which draws us into relationship with the Triune God. We are invited to engage the Bible in multiple ways: to read, study, believe, treasure and even to memorize. Among Lutherans the Bible is the authoritative source and norm for faith because the Word of God reveals Jesus Christ to us. Powell reminds us that Lutherans are Jesus Christians.

### Learning Goals of Session I:

- To develop a theological understanding of the Bible as the Word of God.
- To encounter the three fold way that Lutherans understand the Word of God:
  - o Jesus Christ, *the incarnate Word*.
  - o The message of Law and Gospel, *the proclaimed Word*.
  - o The Bible, the *written word*
- To recognize the Bible as telling us what God wants to say to us.
- To appreciate that Lutherans do not have a *peculiar* understanding of the Bible but they do have a *particular* understanding.

### Facilitator Preparations:

- Invite someone else to act as host for the group. The host might help secure an appropriate space (at the church or in their house), provide a map and directions and arrange for refreshments.
- In advance ask participants to bring a Bible with them; and have a few Bibles available.
- View the video to refresh your understanding of the concepts.
- Ensure the television/DVD player is working. Cue the DVD to the appropriate session.
- Imagine the whole session (together with the host) and arrange the room for appropriate conversation in large and small groups.
- Creatively imagine ways to make the space you are in more comfortable for all participants. Bring tablecloths to add color. Add a candle to each table. Bring other decorative items from home. Display a cross somewhere prominent, fill a bowl with water and place it in the center of the room, set out the communion wear, or set up a picture or a photo on an easel to enhance the atmosphere of the room.
- Provide hymnals for the opening and closing devotion or secure copyright permission to photocopy the hymn and prayers.
- Secure copies of the ELCA Constitution: Article xx from the ELCA website: [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) (Also available as Handout #1.)
- Secure copies of *Luther's Small Catechism*: Luther's explanation of the second article of the Apostle's Creed. Also found in the ELW.

### Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes):

- Welcome all participants as they arrive.
- Gather in groups of three or four and share together why you are here.
- Stay in those groups and answer the question: "What thought first comes to mind when you think about the Bible?" After the small groups have shared with one another, invite participants to sum up their collective responses quickly for the whole group.

- Pray ELW pg. 72: Grace to receive the word
- Sing together ELW 510: *Word of God, Come Down on Earth.*

#### Optional Biblical Study (20-30 minutes)

- John 1:1-2
- Gather in groups of three or four.
- *Emphasize Different Words*
  - o Invite each person within the group to read verse 1 out loud, putting the stress on different words and thinking about how this brings out different dimensions of the meaning:

“*In* the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“In *the* beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“In the *beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“In the beginning *was* the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“In the beginning was *the* Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“In the beginning was the *Word*, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Etc.

“*He* was in the beginning with God.”

“He *was* in the beginning with God.”

“He was *in* the beginning with God.”

Etc.

- Together as a group, reflect on the following questions:
  1. How did the meaning of this passage vary as different words were emphasized?
  2. What does this passage mean for you?

#### View Video (19:54 minutes)

#### Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

- *Reflection*
  - o Remember a time in your life when it was difficult to read the Bible. What were your feelings toward the Bible during that time?
  - o Why do some Lutherans *not* approach the Bible enough?
  - o Powell states: “The Bible says exactly what God wants it to say.” How does this statement affirm what you believe about the Bible? How does this statement challenge what you believe about the Bible?
  - o Powell explains: “Lutherans are Jesus Christians.” Have you heard this statement before? Does this statement strike you as encouraging? Does this statement strike you as concerning?
- *Reflection for Congregational Leadership*
  - o List the places and programs where the Bible is approached regularly in your congregation.
    - What do you notice about your list?
    - What is missing from your list?
  - o Among those places and programs that approach the Bible regularly, describe how the Bible is approached? Using the ELCA Constitution as your guide, is the Bible

considered the incarnate Word, the proclaimed word, the written word or some combination of the three?

Optional Reflection/Action (10 minutes)

- Turn to pg. 1162 in the ELW. Reflect on the statement from the third article of Luther's Small Catechism :

“I believe that by my own understand or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel.”

- We expect the Bible to reveal Christ to us. The Bible brings us to Christ and keeps us grounded in Christ. Take five minutes to reflect on this statement with others. After five minutes write a prayer together with those in your group that you might use before you read the Bible.

Closing (5 minutes)

Pray the prayer your group created. Or Pray ELW pg. 21: First Sunday of Christmas Year C

## Adult Study: Seven Sessions

### Curriculum Plan: Session 2 – What Lutherans Say About the Bible

Offering explanations of a few Lutheran buzz words, Powell explores the typical and traditional Lutheran understandings of Scripture in this session. Powell introduces the primary Lutheran approach for reading and interpreting Scripture as **Law and Gospel**. “This message of law and gospel,” Powell says, “is at the heart of scripture.” God’s living word comes to us as both judgment and salvation, both Law and Gospel.

In addition to the principle of Law of Gospel, Lutherans emphasize the importance of Bible as the only authority for Divine Revelation. The principle of *sola scriptura* – scripture alone - does not reject reason and experience but holds the Bible as the only source for knowing divine truth that God reveals to us.

Martin Luther taught that there is a distinction between passages to be interpreted literally and those passages figuratively. Scripture is to be interpreted in its **plain sense** – the meaning most obvious to its original readers. This is particularly true for the book of Revelation which was a book written for a group of Christians undergoing persecution.

The Bible is God’s word for all. It is not a private magic book. As a result, Lutherans support a **public interpretation** that listens for what God is saying to Israel and to the church as the general meaning of the text.

#### Learning Goals of Session 2:

- To develop a particularly Lutheran understanding about the Bible
- To understand the Lutheran theological concepts of Law and Gospel, *sola scriptura*, the Plain Sense and the Public Interpretation.
- To identify the plain sense of scripture as the meaning most obvious to the original readers.
- To understand that the Bible is *not* a private magic book but the church’s public witness.

#### Facilitator Preparations:

- Invite someone else to act as host for the group. The host might help secure an appropriate space (at the church or in their house), provide a map and directions and arrange for refreshments.
- In advance ask participants to bring a Bible with them; and have a few Bibles available.
- View the video to refresh your understanding of the concepts.
- Ensure the television/DVD player is working. Cue the DVD to the appropriate session.
- Imagine the whole session (together with the host) and arrange the room for appropriate conversation in large and small groups.
- Creatively imagine ways to make the space you are in more comfortable for all participants. Bring tablecloths to add color. Add a candle to each table. Bring other decorative items from home. Display a cross somewhere prominent, fill a bowl with water and place it in the center of the room, set out the communion wear, or set up a picture or a photo on an easel to enhance the atmosphere of the room.
- Provide hymnals for the opening & closing devotion or secure copyright permission to photocopy the hymn and prayers.
- Make copies of the handout for Session 2 “Lutheran Buzzwords” found in the appendix of this study guide.
- Paper and pens will be necessary for the reflection exercise.

### Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes):

- Welcome all participants as they arrive.
- Gather in groups of three or four and share together why you are here.
- Stay in those groups and answer the question: “What are your earliest memories of the Bible?” After the small groups have shared with one another, invite participants to sum up their collective responses quickly for the whole group.
- Pray ELW pg. 220 Thanksgiving for the Word (select petitions)
- Sing together ELW 509: *God’s Word is Our Great Heritage*.

### (Optional) Biblical Study (20-30 minutes)

- Mary’s Song: Luke 1:46-55
- Gather in groups of three or four.
- What does this text say that brings God’s word of judgment?
- What does this text say that brings God’s word of salvation?

### View Video Session 2 (26:25 minutes)

### Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

- *Reflection*
  - o Powell explains that God’s word speaks both judgment and salvation; both condemnation and redemption. God’s word reveals our brokenness but it also forgives our brokenness.
    - Name some examples of human brokenness you witness every day.
    - Name some examples of human forgiveness you witness every day.
  - o Martin Luther’s priority in interpreting scripture was to look for Law and Gospel; God’s commandments and God’s promises.
    - From Mary’s *Magnificat*: “God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1:52-53)
      - ∞ How might someone who is monetarily rich literally interpret this passage as Law? As Gospel?
      - ∞ How might someone who is monetarily poor literally interpret this passage as Gospel? As Law?
      - ∞ How might someone who is rich figuratively interpret this passage as Law? As Gospel?
      - ∞ How might someone who is poor figuratively interpret this passage as Gospel? As Law?
  - o How do you react to these statements? “The whole Bible is both law and gospel. The Gospel might be more pleasant but both law and gospel are good and necessary.”
    - Name some ways we might understand the law and commandments of God as a treasure?
  - o Why is it important for the church to publicly guide the interpretation of Scripture? What is problematic when we consider the Bible a “magic book”?
- *Reflection for Congregational Leadership*
  - o How does your congregation support the public interpretation of Scripture? Where is your congregation actively interpreting Scripture?



- In a Bible Study in your congregation how might you convey the following statement? “What the Bible means to you should be consistent with what the Bible means for everybody.”
- “The meaning of scripture is found in the combination of public interpretation and personal application.” In what ways does your congregation support and encourage this combination?

(Optional) Reflection/Action (10 minutes)

- Turn to the Confession and Forgiveness (Absolution) in your congregation’s hymnal. (pgs. 94-96 in the ELW)
  - Reflect on the confession. Where do you see God’ laws and commandments at work? Do you see God’s promises here?
  - Reflection on the absolution. Where do you see the Gospel and God’s promises at work? Do you see God’s law here?
- “The whole Bible is both law and gospel. The Gospel might be more pleasant but both law and gospel are good and necessary.” Take five minutes to reflect on this statement with others. Using the confession and absolution found in your congregation’s hymnal as a model write a confession and absolution together with those in your group that you might use before you read the Bible.

Closing (10 minutes)

Pray ELW pg. 38 Lectionary 8 Year C

## **Curriculum Plan: Session 3 – Where the Bible Comes From**

Simply put, the Bible comes from God through the church. In session three, Powell makes clear that the Bible is not simple to understand. Misunderstanding is always quite possible. In fact, misunderstanding is very common. Over the centuries the church has had to confess and renounce harmful misinterpretations. Lutherans treasure understanding and interpretation. Faithful interpretation requires humility and understanding comes about when people gather for conversation about what the Bible means. Lutherans are committed to dialogue when seeking the truth of what God is saying through scripture.

### Learning Goals of Session 3:

- To explore the question “Where does the Bible come from?”
- To investigate the dynamics of understanding and misunderstanding the Bible.
- To understand five key principles for interpreting scripture:
  - o Lutherans interpret scripture contextually;
  - o Lutherans apply scriptural teaching to the present through a principle of analogy;
  - o Lutherans interpret “scripture in light of scripture”;
  - o Lutherans believe some things in scripture are more important than others;
  - o Lutherans believe that the Church has the responsibility to determine the extent to which biblical teaching applies to the present day.

### Facilitator Preparations:

- Invite someone else to act as host for the group. The host might help secure an appropriate space (at the church or in their house), provide a map and directions and arrange for refreshments.
- In advance ask participants to bring a Bible with them; and have a few Bibles available.
- View the video to refresh your understanding of the concepts.
- Ensure the television/DVD player is working. Cue the DVD to the appropriate session.
- Imagine the whole session (together with the host) and arrange the room for appropriate conversation in large and small groups.
- Creatively imagine ways to make the space you are in more comfortable for all participants. Bring tablecloths to add color. Add a candle to each table. Bring other decorative items from home. Display a cross somewhere prominent, fill a bowl with water and place it in the center of the room, set out the communion wear, or set up a picture or a photo on an easel to enhance the atmosphere of the room.
- Provide hymnals for the opening & closing devotion or secure copyright permission to photocopy the hymn and prayers.
- Gather three or four different Bible translations for the Optional Biblical Study. Have enough bibles of each translation available for different groups. Or make photocopies of the passages from a variety of translations and put them together on a handout.
- Make copies of the handout for Session 3 “Interpreting Scripture” found in the appendix of this study guide.
- Paper and pens will be necessary for the reflection exercise.

### Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes):

- Welcome all participants as they arrive.

- Gather in groups of three or four and particularly if newcomers have joined the class share together why you are here.
- Stay in those groups and answer the question: “Who formed you in your understanding of the Bible?” After the small groups have shared with one another, invite participants to sum up their collective responses quickly for the whole group.
- Pray ELW pg. 25 Eighth Sunday after Epiphany Year B
- Sing together ELW 524: *What Is This Place?*

#### Optional Biblical Study (20 minutes)

- (This exercise needs various translations of the Bible.)
- Gather in groups of three or four.
- Read 1 Peter 3:8-9 in several different English translations, noticing the different connotations that they offer.
  - o What words are different? How does the meaning of this passage vary as different words are used?
  - o What phrases are different? How does the meaning of this passage vary with different phrases?
  - o What does this passage mean for you?

#### View Video (23:48 minutes)

#### Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

- *Reflection*
  - o In your experience when have you seen the Bible misunderstood?
    - Why do you think the Bible is so often misunderstood?
  - o Powell stated, “It doesn’t do any good if you believe the Bible if in fact you have misunderstood it.” How do you react to this statement?
  - o Describe an experience you have had where you disagreed with someone’s interpretation of a biblical passage?
    - Lutheran treasure dialogue. Where have you experienced Lutheran’s insisting on dialogue among people who disagree? If you have not experienced this, what areas do you think Lutherans should insist that people dialogue where there is major disagreement?
  - o Discuss the role of humility in interpreting the Bible.
    - What does humble interpretation look like?
  - o “Lutherans recognize that some things in scripture are more important than others.”
    - How does this principle affect how you read and interpret the Bible?
- *Reflection for Congregational Leadership*
  - o Look over the five approaches Powell explores on the handout. Of the five approaches outlined for interpretation in this session which is most commonly used in your congregation?
  - o How might the congregational leadership encourage other ways of interpreting scripture?
  - o How does your congregation support dialogue when dealing with difficult issues of biblical interpretation?
    - In what ways might your congregation actively create opportunities for dialogue in the future?

Reflection/Action (10 minutes)

- Take five minutes to jot down the names of those friends and family close to you who have a very different opinion than you about an important topic. Also name the topic of disagreement. Imagine yourself asking this individual to tell you more about their perspective. What would active listening look like? What feelings or past experiences might prevent you from listening? What biblical principles might encourage you to have a difficult conversation?
  - o As you are comfortable pray silently or out loud with those members of your small group. Name specifically those individuals with whom you disagree. Pray for the posture to listen deeply to their experience and perspective.

Closing (10 minutes)

Pray ELW pg. 31 Resurrection of Our Lord; Vigil of Easter

## Curriculum Plan: Session 4 – Interpreting the Bible in Context

In this session, Powell provides guidance for discerning biblical truth. Lutherans believe that everything the Bible says is true. Some Lutherans believe that the Bible's truth is conveyed through various literary forms found within the Bible. Exploring the literary forms of the Bible gives rise to important clues that help us interpret the text. For instance, some Lutherans understand the book of Jonah to contain certain characteristics that mark it as a Hebrew folktale. While some Lutherans may be uncomfortable classifying biblical literature as a folktale, Powell suggests helpful ways of discerning the literary context. For instance we might consult ancient and contemporary Jewish readers of the Old Testament texts. Discerning how biblical texts are interpreted by those for whom it was originally intended offers another helpful view, this time into the historical context of the text. Often this reading reveals the main point of the text. In sum, context matters.

### Learning Goals of Session 4:

- To understand the historical context of the Bible as the circumstances any writing in the Bible was intended to address: when was it written, where was it written, when it written, what was the author trying to say and why?
- To understand the literary context of the Bible as the variety of literary forms found in the Bible: psalms, proverbs, parables, miracle stories, genealogies, historical accounts, law codes, poems, hymns, letters, epistles, prophetic oracles, apocalyptic, legends and folk tales, etc.
- To explore how some Lutherans understand different stories (such as Adam and Eve and Jonah and the Whale) and different books of the Bible (such as Revelation)?

### Facilitator Preparations:

- Invite someone else to act as host for the group. The host might help secure an appropriate space (at the church or in their house), provide a map and directions and arrange for refreshments.
- In advance ask participants to bring a Bible with them; and have a few Bibles available.
- View the video to refresh your understanding of the concepts.
- Ensure the television/DVD player is working. Cue the DVD to the appropriate session.
- Imagine the whole session (together with the host) and arrange the room for appropriate conversation in large and small groups.
- Creatively imagine ways to make the space you are in more comfortable for all participants. Bring tablecloths to add color. Add a candle to each table. Bring other decorative items from home. Display a cross somewhere prominent, fill a bowl with water and place it in the center of the room, set out the communion wear, or set up a picture or a photo on an easel to enhance the atmosphere of the room.
- Provide hymnals for the opening & closing devotion or secure copyright permission to photocopy the hymn and prayers.
- Paper and pens will be necessary for the bible study and reflection exercise.

### Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes):

- Welcome all participants as they arrive.
  - Gather in groups of three or four and particularly if newcomers have joined the class share together why you are here.
  - Stay in those groups discuss one or more of the following:
    - o If you have a favorite verse or story in the Bible, why is this story or verse meaningful to you?
    - o Tell a story of a time when the Bible had particular meaning in your life.
    - o Is there someone else that you know for whom the Bible has particular importance?
- After the small groups have shared with one another, invite participants to sum up their collective responses quickly for the whole group.
- Pray ELW pg. 23 Third Sunday after Epiphany Year C
  - Sing together ELW 868: *Isaiah in a Vision Did of Old.*

### Optional Biblical Study (20 minutes)

- Paraphrase the Passage
  - o Read Psalm 23 and then summarize or re-write it in your own words. Then compare your paraphrase with the original, noting what you might have added, left out, or changed.

### View Video (29:02 minutes)

### Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

- *Reflection*
  - o Describe a time when you have heard or used the Bible quoted outside of a church setting?
  - o Describe a time when you felt you heard the Bible quoted “out of context.”
    - What was the purpose for using the quote?
    - Was the quote effective or misunderstood?
  - o What questions would you ask to discern the historical context of a biblical passage?
    - What resources might you use to help you answer the questions of historical context?
    - Where might we access Bible dictionaries, commentaries and Bible atlases, etc.?
  - o What are the different literary forms of the Bible?
    - How do those various literary forms convey biblical truth differently?
  - o After having seen this session’s video how has your understanding about the nature of biblical truth changed?
  - o Powell stated, “Our focus is on how the Bible reveals Christ to us and draws us closer to God.” Do you agree? How might you say this statement in your own words?
- *Reflection for Congregational Leadership*
  - o Where does your congregation approach the interpretation of the Bible in its historical and literary context? Who is involved in this interpretation?
  - o How might your congregation prepare individuals to interpret the Bible in its historical and literary context?

- Does your congregation provide access to resources for individuals and groups to do further study in the historical and literary context of the Bible?
- Is your congregational library up-to-date and comprehensive containing concordances, commentaries and Bible atlases?

Reflection/Action (10 minutes)

- In this session, Powell suggested making a time capsule that contained documents from our North American context. Perhaps we would include stories of our heroes, important addresses and speeches, political and national documents, folk songs, newspaper headlines, classic literature and historical accounts. Upon discovering this time capsule one thousand or two thousand years later it would be challenging to discern which texts were typical of a particular form of literature.
  - If you were to create a time capsule for your congregation, what would you include?
  - Would you include the Bible? Why or why not?
  - How do you suppose these documents and the Bible might be approached if your capsule was found in five hundred years?

Closing (10 minutes)

Pray ELW pg. 45 Lectionary 21 Year B

## Curriculum Plan: Session 5 – Determining Right from Wrong

How do we use the Bible to determine right from wrong or to guide our perceptions of morality? The Bible certainly does contain guidance for how to live, but it is not first and foremost a book about morality. The Bible reveals Christ and draws us into relationship with the Triune God and nurtures that relationship.

Concerning statements of law found in the Bible -- there are verses in the Bible that the contemporary church no longer follows. To recognize when a biblical law applies and when it does not apply; when the law should be bound and when the law should be loosed requires conversation and dialogue within the church. The church discerns how the Bible is interpreted. The church is called to bind and loose the laws together. This follows the longstanding rabbinical practice of binding and loosing described by Powell.

When discerning whether the Bible say applies to a particular situation, above all, we search the biblical witness to determine God's justice, God's mercy and God's the gift of faith. What is God doing for us? God is bestowing grace upon grace.

### Learning Goals for Session 5:

- To understand the Bible as a Living Word that reveals Christ and draws us into relationship with Christ.
- To explore the principle of binding and loosing laws in the Bible.
- To keep justice, mercy and faith central to the discussion of ethics and morality.
- To ask not what we ought to do but what is God doing *for us*.

### Facilitator Preparations:

- Invite someone else to act as host for the group. The host might help secure an appropriate space (at the church or in their house), provide a map and directions and arrange for refreshments.
- In advance ask participants to bring a Bible with them; and have a few Bibles available.
- View the video to refresh your understanding of the concepts.
- Ensure the television/DVD player is working. Cue the DVD to the appropriate session.
- Imagine the whole session (together with the host) and arrange the room for appropriate conversation in large and small groups.
- Creatively imagine ways to make the space you are in more comfortable for all participants. Bring tablecloths to add color. Add a candle to each table. Bring other decorative items from home. Display a cross somewhere prominent, fill a bowl with water and place it in the center of the room, set out the communion wear, or set up a picture or a photo on an easel to enhance the atmosphere of the room.
- Provide hymnals for the opening & closing devotion or secure copyright permission to photocopy the hymn and prayers.
- Make copies of the handout for Session 5 "Binding and Loosing" found in the appendix of this study guide.
- Secure copies of *Luther's Small Catechism*: Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments. Also found in the ELW.

### Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes):

- Welcome all participants as they arrive.



- Gather in groups of three or four and particularly if newcomers have joined the class share together why you are here.
- Stay in those groups and answer the question: “What are some biblical principles that shape and guide the way you live?” After the small groups have shared with one another, invite participants to sum up their collective responses quickly for the whole group.
- Pray ELW pg. 26 1 Lent Year A
- Sing together ELW 517: *Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word*.

#### Optional Biblical Study (20 minutes)

- A pattern of Bible reading suggested by David Mann:
  - o Read a portion of the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5.1-12.
  - o Does this passage reveal a
    - Sin to confess?
    - Promise to believe?
    - Example to follow?
    - Command to obey?
    - Knowledge to gain?
  - o And remember to look for this “speck” in your own eye (Matthew 7:3).

#### View Video (27.12 minutes)

#### Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

- *Reflection*
  - o Reflect on Powell’s discussion of binding and loosing. Respond in your own words what it means to bind the law. Respond in your own words what it means to loose the law.
  - o Where are you standing?
    - Do you see the church and society as too permissive?
    - Do you see the church and society as too strict?
  - o Powell gives guidance and warning as we engage in the process of binding and loosing. He states, “When we need to decide if a passage applies to someone’s situation; we need to put ourselves in that same situation.” When have you found yourself standing in someone else’s situation? How did that experience feel? Describe how that changed your perceptions.
  - o Consider an issue very important to your congregation.
    - Do not debate the issue, but consider how one might need to bind the law. Then consider how one might need to loose the law.
- *Reflection for Congregational Leadership*
  - o Congregational leaders can often get caught up in the rules and regulations of being an institutional church. As the church in the world, there is certainly a need to operate the institution in a shrewd manner.
    - What confessions does your congregation need to make for the mistakes that have been made?
    - What absolution does your congregation need to hear to be assured of Christ’s love, grace and mercy for all?
  - o Where is God calling your congregation to justice?
  - o Where is God calling your congregation to mercy?

- Where is God calling your congregation to faithful discipleship in Jesus Christ: loving God and loving neighbors?

Reflection/Action (10 minutes)

- Turn to pg. 1160-1161 in the ELW. In his explanations to the Ten Commandments Luther often extends the meaning of these commands from the way they appear.
  - Read through Luther's explanations of the Ten Commandments. In what ways do you see Luther practicing the principle of binding and loosing?
- Invite a lawyer or judge to join you for this class session. Is binding and loosing a principle that is operating and effective in law courts and settlements? What do you notice about the arena of law that is similar? What do you notice about the arena of law that is different?

Closing (10 minutes)

Pray ELW pg. 39 Lectionary 11 Year C

Or

Pray ELW pg. 220 Thanksgiving for the Word (select petitions)

## **Curriculum Plan: Session 6 – The Many Meanings of the Bible**

In this session Powell invites us to explore the Living Word of the Bible. God continues to speak through the biblical witness today. What is more, the way we experience God's words in the Bible today is not the way we experienced meaning in the past; nor will it be the way we experience meaning in the future. God does not say the same thing to everyone. Sometimes the passage in which we hear law another will hear Gospel. Depending upon our social location we will find different meanings in the biblical witness.

The notion of different meanings often conjures up arguments and disagreements over right and wrong meanings of the Bible. Lutherans, however, anticipate that the Bible can mean different things to different people. And Lutherans allow for and encourage the possibility of many meanings found in the biblical witness.

### Learning Goals for Session 6:

- To appreciate that the Bible means different things to different people.
- To wrestle with the idea that the Bible has more than one right meaning.
- To understand the nature of social location and that every human being has a social location: age, race, gender, career, income, education, marital status, etc.
- To explore the human capacity for empathy.
- To understand that being a Lutheran means being a part of the holy catholic and apostolic church.

### Facilitator Preparations:

- Invite someone else to act as host for the group. The host might help secure an appropriate space (at the church or in their house), provide a map and directions and arrange for refreshments.
- In advance ask participants to bring a Bible with them; and have a few Bibles available.
- View the video to refresh your understanding of the concepts.
- Ensure the television/DVD player is working. Cue the DVD to the appropriate session.
- In this session I would encourage you to consider going to a different location, other than you have met before. Perhaps to a place with a different social location where you might encounter different classes, different ethnicities, different cultural experiences, etc. If this is possible then it is very important to imagine the whole session (together with the host) and arrange the room for appropriate conversation in large and small groups.
- Creatively imagine ways to make the space you are in more comfortable for all participants. Bring tablecloths to add color. Add a candle to each table. Bring other decorative items from home. Display a cross somewhere prominent, fill a bowl with water and place it in the center of the room, set out the communion wear, or set up a picture or a photo on an easel to enhance the atmosphere of the room.
- Provide hymnals for the opening & closing devotion or secure copyright permission to photocopy the hymn and prayers.

### Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes):

- Welcome all participants as they arrive.
- Gather in groups of three or four and particularly if newcomers have joined the class share together why you are here.

- Stay in those groups and answer the question: “Who formed you in your understanding of the Bible?” After the small groups have shared with one another, invite participants to sum up their collective responses quickly for the whole group.
- Pray ELW pg. 43 Lectionary 17 Year B
- Sing together ELW 737: *He Comes to Us as One Unknown*.

#### Optional Biblical Study (20 minutes)

- Empathize with Characters
  - o Read a Bible story repeatedly, pretending that you are a different character each time and sensing what you think and how you feel about what transpires.
  - o For example, read the story of the prodigal son from the perspective of the prodigal, the father, and the older brother.
    - From the perspectives of these various characters answer the question: “Why does this young man end up hungry in a pig pen?”
- OR: Check Cross-References
  - o Read the story of the Last Supper in the Gospels and in First Corinthians:
    - Matt. 26:26-29;
    - Mark 14:22-25;
    - Luke 22:15-20;
    - John 6:51-58;
    - 1 Cor. 11:23-25
  - o If possible, make copies of pg. 284 (the Last Supper passages) in *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* by Kurt Aland. Many pastors have this resource. Or it might be found in your church library or public library.
  - o Show participants a study Bible and help them locate the place in the notes that leads them to find parallel passages in other books of the Bible -- usually listed in the margins or at the bottom of the page.
  - o Or, use a concordance to find other verses that use one of the key words in your text.

#### View Video (26:25 minutes)

#### Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

- *Reflection*
  - o Respond to this question: “Why does this young man (the Prodigal Son) end up hungry in a pig pen?”
  - o Take a moment to describe your social location.
    - How does your social location affect and shape your view of certain stories in the Bible?
  - o If you have traveled to a different part of the world for an extended period of time, describe the adjustments you needed to make to feel comfortable in this new environment.
    - How would you describe the social location of those you were visiting?
    - How would you describe your social location?
  - o In what ways will the perspective of multiple meanings enrich or enhance your own encounter with biblical texts? In what ways will the perspective of multiple meanings challenge your own encounter with biblical texts?

- How will you encounter the perspectives of other people – people of different social locations?
  - What issues in particular motivate your feeling of empathy?
  - Have you ever tried to walk in someone else’s shoes – literally or figuratively? What was that experience like?
- *Reflection for Congregational Leadership*
  - Is there one prevalent meaning from the biblical witness presented in your congregation?
    - Are other meanings present but silent?
    - How might you as leaders make room for the silent meanings?
  - Congregations often imagine themselves as the Good Samaritan helping others in their greatest need. Ask yourself, “Are we the ones in the ditch?” And, “who is going to help me?”
  - Who are you as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church? How might you celebrate your part of the perspective? How might you celebrate the perspectives of the whole church?

Reflection/Action (10 minutes)

- Consider holding this session in a completely different context. If you are gathering at a church, gather at someone’s house. If you are gathering at someone’s house, gather at a local restaurant. If you are gathering in a classroom, gather in a housing shelter. If you are gathering inside, gather outside. If you are gathering in an urban church, gather in a local park. If you are gathering in a rural church, gather on Main Street. If you are gathering in the nursing home, gather in the dining hall. If you are gathering in the youth room, gather in a youth detention center. If you are gathering in the library, gather in the public library. If you are meeting in the fellowship hall, move into the worship space. Or maybe something more radical than that. Perhaps a change in space will be a slight change in your perspective. Perhaps a change in space will encourage your empathy for someone else.

Closing (10 minutes)

Pray ELW pg. 220 Thanksgiving for the Word (select petitions)

## **Curriculum Plan: Session 7 – Devotional Bible Reading**

In this final session, Mark Allen Powell offers suggestions for establishing a regular practice of devotional Bible reading. Reading the Bible regularly is no small task. God will certainly be present and as the years go by changes in your life will be evident. In addition, Powell offers helpful advice for the pitfalls that often arise when reading scripture regularly. What happens when we encounter a passage that we do not understand? What happens when we encounter a passage that we just cannot believe? These are common experiences for all Christians. Misunderstandings and doubts are a part of the Christian encounter with the Triune God. Encountering God in the Bible is a very humbling experience at times. Thus Powell also encourages the practice of prayer before reading the text as a way of preparing and expecting God to speak. Your prayer can be a prayer from worship, a prayer from the ELW, or a free prayer that you say yourself. Prayer settles the heart, and mind, and soul to contemplate the activity of God present in the Bible and throughout our life.

### Learning Goals for Session 7:

- To encourage regular Bible reading as a planned spiritual practice.
- To recognize God's promise to be present in devotional Bible reading.
- To support spiritual growth through regular bible reading.

### Facilitator Preparations:

- Invite someone else to act as host for the group. The host might help secure an appropriate space (at the church or in their house), provide a map and directions and arrange for refreshments.
- In advance ask participants to bring a Bible with them; and have a few Bibles available.
- View the video to refresh your understanding of the concepts.
- Ensure the television/DVD player is working. Cue the DVD to the appropriate session.
- Imagine the whole session (together with the host) and arrange the room for appropriate conversation in large and small groups.
- Creatively imagine ways to make the space you are in more comfortable for all participants. Bring tablecloths to add color. Add a candle to each table. Bring other decorative items from home. Display a cross somewhere prominent, fill a bowl with water and place it in the center of the room, set out the communion wear, or set up a picture or a photo on an easel to enhance the atmosphere of the room.
- Provide hymnals for the opening & closing devotion or secure copyright permission to photocopy the hymn and prayers.
- Make copies of the handout for Session 7 "Reflecting on Scripture" found in the appendix of this study guide.
- Paper and pens will be necessary for the reflection exercise.

### Welcoming and Opening Devotion (10 minutes):

- Welcome all participants as they arrive.
- Gather in groups of three or four and particularly if newcomers have joined the class share together why you are here.
- Stay in those groups and answer the question: "Who formed you in your understanding of the Bible?" After the small groups have shared with one another, invite participants to sum up their collective responses quickly for the whole group.
- Pray ELW pg. 21 1 Christmas Year C

“Shine into our hearts the light of your wisdom, O God, and open our minds to the knowledge of your word, that in all things we may think and act according to your good will and may live continually in the light of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**”

- Sing together ELW 512: *Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil.*

#### Optional Biblical Study (20 minutes)

- Ask Questions for Personal Application
  - o Read Luke 10
  - o Read the passage and ask questions like these (suggested by Donald Whitney):
    - Does this text reveal something I should believe about God?
    - Does this text reveal something I should praise or thank or trust God for?
    - Does this text reveal something I should pray about for myself or others?
    - Does this text reveal something I should have a new attitude about?
    - Does this text reveal something I should make a decision about?
    - Does this text reveal something I should do for the sake of Christ, others, or myself?

#### View Video (26.16 minutes)

#### Discussion Questions (15-20 minutes)

- *Reflection*
  - o Have you ever had a plan to read the Bible regularly? Were you able to keep up with that plan? How long or why did you continue? When or why did you stop?
  - o What should you do if you do not understand what you are reading?
  - o What should you do if you do not believe what you are reading?
  - o Powell said, “If you read the bible regularly with an openness to receiving God’s Word you will grow spiritually.” Have you had this experience? What might you share with others about why you believe this growth occurred?
  - o Have you ever encountered honey in the Bible?
- *Reflection for Congregational Leadership*
  - o List the ways your congregation specifically supports regular devotional reading of the Bible?
    - What do you notice about your list?
    - What is missing from your list?
  - o If someone who is reading the Bible devotionally at home becomes frustrated because they do not understand what they are reading or they do not believe what they are reading is there an obvious place or person to turn for guidance and support?
  - o Has your congregation created a family home devotional for the season of Advent or Lent?
    - How might the creation of such a devotional inaugurate new disciplines of biblical reading?
    - What other ways might your congregation support regular devotional Bible reading?

Reflection/Action (10 minutes)

- Make a plan for regular devotional reading of the Bible.
  - o Decide when and where you will read.
  - o Decide what part of the Bible will you read?
  - o Decide which method or methods you will use to support your devotional reading.
- Share your plan with members of the group.
- Explore ways to hold each other accountable
  - o Will you covenant with one another?
  - o Will you meet regularly to talk about your plan and your commitment?

Closing (10 minutes)

Pray ELW pg. 45 Lectionary 21 Year A