

# My Life in Christ

An Introduction to  
a relationship with God  
as a disciple of Jesus Christ  
through the ministry of  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church



# An Introduction

How are you feeling? What's it like taking a firm step forward in faith knowledge and application? Does it feel comfortable -- like your favorite shoes? Or perhaps you've been away for awhile, and you're still not convinced that this is what you need to know or learn? Or maybe this is like a blind date -- full of anxiety and questions?

In any event, I want to welcome you to this Connecting Study - A Life in Christ! It is my hope that you will come to see the depth of God's love for you as an individual -- and for His call for you and us together in community into His world. This will happen by connecting together in small groups and this through learning about the basic teachings of the Christian faith as revealed to us in the Bible and through God's people.

## Your Questions

You certainly have questions. Maybe -- "What are Lutherans like? What does it mean to be a Christian? Is there a heaven or hell? What are they like? Does God really have a plan for me? What about baptism? What's going on in Holy Communion? What's happening in Worship?"

Some things may trouble you... "I don't think I like the idea of being born again -- I know too many weirdoes and radicals who claim that. How can you think the Bible is true? What's it mean to have a relationship with God? Who really is Jesus? Why do there seem to be so many hypocrites in the church? Does God really care about me?"

I hope you will ask your questions. Unspoken questions never go unanswered -- they simply get answered from typically unreliable sources. Asking questions helps you gather the data you need to formulate a cogent, intelligent response. The content of this "Life in Christ" resource seeks to anticipate many of your questions -- but will not cover them all. Study the content 1<sup>st</sup>. Then come together for insight, application, and spiritual growth! Connect with others! You can email me [pastored@emmanuelclovis.org](mailto:pastored@emmanuelclovis.org). You need to know that our lives this side of heaven will be a constant curve of growth in knowledge and a call for obedience to all that God puts before us. I know you are in for an amazing journey. Welcome!

## Our Questions

Also important to us are your needs and hopes. So we ask questions of you: what are your most pressing spiritual, emotional, and physical needs? How can we best serve together? We want to know. Not every need can be answered immediately -- we're always "in process" in our relationship with God -- but at least knowing your needs helps us to serve you more effectively.

But a most important question which we pose to you is: who and what are you in the eyes of God? Some answer this in terms of membership or what is expected of them at church. The church, however, is most concerned about your relationship with God. All other relationships arise out of that primary relationship.

## A Life with God

Just as human relationships can flourish or wither, so can ours with our Lord. Perhaps you've experienced this. Clear communication, honesty, hard work, personal discovery, humor... all these and more help us in all our relationships. So too with God. A Life in Christ is just that -- Life. How we live, interact, learn, and grow. Our goal is to begin that journey with the One who is life: Jesus Christ.

# Contents

|            |                                   |               |
|------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Session 1  | Relationship – Not Religion       | pg. 5         |
| Session 2  | Words of Life – The Bible         | pg. 9         |
| Session 3  | God the Father – Creator          | pg. 16        |
| Session 4  | Sin and Temptation                | pg. 21        |
| Session 5  | Jesus Christ – God With Us        | pg. 29        |
| Session 6  | Jesus Christ – The Savior         | pg. 36        |
| Session 7  | The Holy Spirit – Who Works Faith | pg. 41        |
| Session 8  | Baptism – A Birthday Celebration  | pg. 48        |
| Session 9  | The Lord’s Supper – God With Us   | pg. 56        |
| Session 10 | A New Life in Christ              | pg. 64        |
| Session 11 | The Worshiping Community          | pg. 71        |
| Session 12 | Discipleship or Membership? Yes!  | pg. 83        |
|            | Discipleship Covenant             | pg. 85        |
|            | New Member Profile                | folder sleeve |

# Session 1

## Relationship -- Not Religion

**Overview:** *A life with God requires having a knowledge of God. What, according to the Bible, does it mean to know God? How does a person acquire the knowledge of God? Why must our knowledge of God depend upon His self-revelation and not on our own religious opinions? What is God's word in its primary sense? Why is Christ called the Word?*

### Knowing God Brings Life

Let's look up Ephesians 1:1-10

*(That's code for the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of the book of Ephesians -- in the last fifth of the Bible -- verses 1-10. The chapter numbers are the big, bold-faced numbers you see in the middle of the text; the verse numbers are very small.)*

1. Author: (vs. 1) Paul, the inspired author of this letter to a church in modern-day Turkey, is describing what life in Christ is to be like.
2. What is God's goal for your life? (vs 2)
3. What is God's call for your life? (vs 3)
4. What is significant about God's timing for your life? (vs. 4)
5. Describe God's attitude (vs. 5, 9)
6. What measure does God use in relating to us? (vs. 7, 8)
7. What in the world (literally) is God doing? What is He about? (vs. 9-10)

Look up Ephesians 1:13-14 (Signed, Sealed, and Delivered!)  
Who is "included" to "praise?"

Look up Ephesians 2:1-10 (Dead vs. Alive)

1. What is the reality of all outside of Jesus Christ? (vs. 1-3)
2. What is the first word of vs. 4?
3. What is the reality of all in Christ? (vs. 4-10)

Look up Ephesians 2:19-22 (Whole New Picture of the Church)

Would you agree that God seems not so much to be concerned with a building of 4 walls as much as He is with being a dynamic – growing movement in the heart and lives of people?

## God Wants a Relationship, Not a Religion

God doesn't want institutions. He isn't interested in buildings or programs. He doesn't even care about how religious you are. He wants to build a family -- a community -- a place where He makes Himself fully known and where we are fully known by Him and each other. That's risky!

## Knowing God is Different than Knowing About God

*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*  
*John 17:3*

Throughout the history of God's people, they often get confused. Many times the Jews seemed to think that as long as they did their religious duty -- came to church, sacrificed, got their kids circumcised, gave money to the poor -- they were right with God. Again and again God sent prophets who told them: *"the Lord desires mercy and not sacrifice"* Hosea 6:6

Unfortunately, the Christian church has often done the same thing. We often think that simply knowing about God is enough... i.e., if we know enough doctrine, or memorize Scripture, or come to church. But a vital thing Jesus came to tell us was that life comes not from simply knowing about God and what He wants -- it comes from being in an honest, intimate relationship with Him.

What Lutherans have always been good at is the head part of Christianity. We know lots of stuff -- but have struggled to link the head and the heart. Knowing God is about love and trust, not just intelligence or a series of facts. It is of intimacy, companionship, and yearning to know more of the Lord -- firsthand knowledge, not just hearsay. John writes, *"We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* (1 John 2:3; 4:8) Talk and knowledge isn't enough. It's critical -- and we can't have real relationship without it -- but God wants us to have so much more.

Imagine that you had kids who knew all kinds of things about you and your values, hopes, and dreams. They could recite for you chapter and verse every piece of advice you ever gave them about life. But these same kids never said, I love you, Dad. They never sought your heart, or wanted to spend time with you, or who lived completely opposite to the values they recited back to you?

Now imagine kids who know nothing about your values, but tell you all the time they love you. When you want them to sit down with you to really learn and understand your hopes and dreams for them, they don't want to go deep, they just want you to give them a \$20 bill so they can go to the movies.

Neither of these scenarios is what God wants for us. He wants both our head and our heart. He wants it all because He gives it all. That's what being part of a family is all about.

Living a life that God wants doesn't come out of fear or retribution, but out of a clear understanding of His love for us. You see, God doesn't love us for what we do. (I'm afraid He'd be sadly disappointed!) Rather, He loves us for who we are -- members of His family!

But just as life is described as knowing God, death is pictured as being apart from God -- a broken relationship. Paul writes in the book of Romans: *"there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."* (3:10-12)

# How Can We Know God?

So how do we come to know God? Either He reveals Himself to us or we have to come up with some idea of who He is and what He is like on our own. That would mean we have to trust our own powers of reasoning.

**Reason is a poor guide.** Why?

1. On the one hand, God by definition is too great and awesome for us to grasp completely with the limited powers of our minds.
2. But a more fundamental problem is that human reason is corrupted by things like pride, greed, and impatience -- in short, corrupted by our sin.

## God Reveals Himself in His Word

You may think this session is going to be all about the Bible. It's not. (That's **next** session.) Rather, we discover that God describes His Word to us in very significant ways. There are three primary ways that God reveals Himself in His Word:

### 1. The Creative Power of God (Natural Knowledge)

How does Hebrews 1:3; 11:3; Genesis 1:3 show this?

Read Psalm 19:1-4. Is it fair to say that this formula is true: Word = Works?

Still, this isn't enough. Why not? What conclusion do you come to about God from this evidence alone?

### 2. Christ the Word of God

God communicates Himself to us ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ.

How does John 1:1-14 explain this? Do you see a connection to Genesis 1:3?

Look again at Hebrews 1:1-3. What's the difference now in how God speaks to us?

Now we have a better picture of God. Not only do we see Him as all-powerful creator of the universe, but we now have a picture of God as an intimate, loving God who cares so much for His creation that He chooses to come and make a personal introduction to those who do not know Him.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:6: *for God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* By reason, we would think it foolish to consider having a face to face kind of relationship with an almighty God. In Christ, we see that God has other plans!

### 3. The Scriptures – Exploring the Bible as the Revealed Word of God – Go to Session 2

# Small Group Study and Discussion I

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. What is (or should be) the church's primary concern?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does the Bible describe life and death?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What's the difference between knowing about God and knowing God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How do we describe the word of God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Why is Christ the ultimate word of God?



# Session 2:

## Words of Life -- The Bible

**Overview:** *We'll try to explore each of the following topics: Messengers of God who spoke His word -- The word of God meaning primarily the good news of what God has done for people -- The inspired and inerrant words of God -- The Bible as words about the word of God -- How the Bible came to be -- The purpose and authority of scripture -- Reading the Bible in light of its purpose -- Bible versions and translations -- Creeds: What does it mean when I say, I believe in God?*

### A Review of Last Session

Knowing God is life -- Not knowing God is death

Reason is a poor guide for knowing God.

We know God through His own revealed word:

Creation, Christ, Scripture

## Knowing God Through His Words

*2 Timothy 3:15-17 ...and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

### The Purpose of Scripture

It is through the words of God in the Bible that He reveals Himself as both Lord of the Universe and as our Savior Jesus Christ. He is both transcendent and immanent -- He is beyond all comprehension (wholly other) and yet our brother and our friend. This is what God reveals in the Bible. His purpose is clear: *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. **But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name***  
*John 20:30-31*

Therefore, the purpose is Scripture is:

1. to bring life by revealing God and His Will for us
2. to bear the author and giver of life, Jesus Christ
3. to guide life by giving us a clear way to live

## **The Authority of Scripture**

We say that the Bible is inspired by God. Literally, the word inspired means God-breathed. When God breathes into something, He gives it life. *the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7* The same is true of God's Word. *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12*

Let's say we agree that the Bible is the Word of God. What is the implication of saying that this collection of writings is the very word of the Living God and not, say, the word of Bob? What claim might it then have on us? How then would we live?

The reason we deal with this topic so early is that everything that will be taught in subsequent sessions is grounded in and arises out of the Bible. Because we believe it to be God's true words of life, we use it exclusively to determine what His desire is for us and for His people. This is our foundation, upon which God builds His family.

## **How The Bible Came to Be**

### **Oral Transmission**

For thousands of years, God's revealed will had been simply spoken from generation to generation. In our modern world, we find this troubling. How could it be reliable? However, consider growing up in a society in which there are not copy machines, tape recorders, or camcorders. If you wanted to remember something precisely -- such as your genealogy (critical for land ownership and family rights), the history of your people, a favorite recipe, a formula for building or farming, or the history of God's action for you -- you recited stories and verses very accurately -- (your enemies would call you on your embellishments) These, we have come to discover, are actually quite precise and could be carried forward accurately for many generations. Because of modern technology, we've actually lost the art of precise oral transmission Remember the telephone game we played in grade school? What a mess we made of it! But simply because we don't remember well, doesn't mean the Hebrews didn't remember exactly the story of God's action in their lives.

Therefore, we feel confident that God would make sure that what He wanted us to know from before the time of Moses would clearly be communicated and passed down to subsequent generations.

### **Written Words**

#### **The Old Testament/First Testament**

Moses was the first author of the Bible. God inspired him to write down His torah -- the Law -- or better translated -- God's instruction. These are the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This occurred around 1450 B.C., the time of or shortly after the escape from slavery in Egypt (the story of the Exodus).

Various other writers recorded God's word and the history of His people from that time. Prophets, scribes, kings, and judges wrote down His words in many books until about the year 400 B.C. The Old Testament was written over a period of about 1000 years.

Still, it was not formally gathered into one testament and formally agreed upon until the year 98 A.D. While there were collections of books (the Septuagint, a Greek version written about 200 B.C.), it took the Council of Jamnia in 98 A.D. to assemble all the books of the Old Testament together into one approved version.

The criteria for acceptance into the Old Testament

Canon was:

1. Not written after 400 B.C.
2. Written primarily in Hebrew
3. The moral character of the contents

Seven books from the Septuagint were rejected. These form the Apocrypha, which means hidden or obscured. Today, only the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches accept the Apocrypha as completely God's word.

## The New Testament/Second Testament

After Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the early Christians believed He was coming back within their lifetime. Therefore they chose not to immediately write down all they had seen and heard. But as the church grew and moved beyond Palestine and to the Gentile community, there became a need for written, eye-witness testimony as to the words and actions of Christ. In addition, as churches grew and struggled with issues of Christian living, heresies, evangelism, and church administration, additional instruction and application of Christ's teachings became important.

New archaeological evidence is showing us that the first books of the New Testament were probably recorded as early as the late 30's A.D. -- within 8-10 years of Christ's death and resurrection. Already the need was felt for written testimony of Christ and His ministry. But the bulk of the New Testament was written from approximately 50 - 100 A.D. The last author was the disciple John, who wrote the book of Revelation in exile on the island of Patmos around 95 A.D.

The books of the New Testament were widely disputed. There were many oddball writings that were clearly not in keeping with the eyewitness testimony of the disciples. As years went on, numerous councils were formed to try and formalize the list of accepted books. These councils always also included the accepted books of the Old Testament as they struggled to form the Bible as we know it today.

That didn't happen until 325 A.D., when at the Council of Nicea, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria proposed a list that was accepted by the Church as a whole. The criteria for acceptance into the New

Testament:

1. Widely used by many churches
2. Written by an eyewitness
3. Consistent with the moral content of God's revealed word and the teachings of Christ

## Archaeological Evidence Makes a Difference

While we don't use archaeological evidence to determine the truth of God's Word, it is amazing to note some of the data that has been uncovered. In 1947, the Dead Sea Scrolls were uncovered, and it has been a delightful discovery to see that they continue to verify, rather than to bring into question, the words of the Old Testament. Isaiah in particular has been a tremendous treasure. In one fell swoop, the age of existing Old Testament manuscripts was backed up 1200 years. And in those 12 centuries, we discovered that there were literally no meaningful changes or disputes with the copy of Isaiah which we already had!

Archaeology also helps us build a foundation of history which helps place into context the words of God. As opposed to the Mormon church (which makes fantastic claims of an exiled Jewish society of grand scale here in North America following the fall of Jerusalem in 720 B.C.) which has no archaeological evidence at all, the Christian faith has literally 10's of thousands of dig evidence which helps to verify the biblical testimony. Jericho has been found after decades of dispute. We believe we've found Sodom. The pyramids still stand as a testimony to the slavery of Jews.

## Why Does This Matter?

Isn't it just a matter of faith, anyway? Ultimately, we cannot prove the Bible to be true. But we are thrilled at the evidence which helps to support its claims. For many, it is important that there is some external evidence. God does not call us to blind faith -- but to faith tempered by reason. Our reason is subject to God and His Word, not in charge of it -- but it still matters and we are to use it as a gift from our Lord.

**It really matters because God wants us to have confidence in His Word.** Clearly, if these are words of life, then God would make sure that we have all we need to trust confidently in His promises. That's one reason we are adamant that all of Scripture is inspired and without error. It's not a science book or a technical manual, to be sure. But if some is true and some is not, how do we, with human reason, draw that line? I would rather join with Christ in saying that *not one letter will be removed from my Word*

Sure, we have tons of translations. Every translation is ultimately an interpretation of the Old Testament Hebrew and the New Testament Greek manuscripts. But you need to know that God has placed in your hands all you need to know with confidence your situation, His love, and His will and plan for your life. Don't put the Bible down because you have doubts about its veracity. Take the challenge of God in Jeremiah: *"you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart"* Jeremiah 29:13

## God's Word Has Integrity

Another reason to consider the truth of God's Word is in its ultimate honesty. Many holy books have been written for different religions. None are as blatantly honest as the Bible. Let me give you an example. If you were Peter and you were writing about your experiences with Jesus, wouldn't you possibly gloss over or change for the better that part about your denying Jesus three times the day before He was crucified? It's in there -- in all its crushing condemnation. If you were Paul, why would you write these words to a young pastor who admires you?: here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst (1 Timothy 1:15) Why not leave out the of whom I am the worst part? The Bible is brutally honest with our condition -- and with the free gift of our salvation in Christ Jesus. We never come off as good or deserving -- only God does. That's a book of integrity. We see all the warts, the blemishes, the sins, the betrayals, the lust, the greed... That's an honest record of who we are and what we are called out of to have a life in Christ.

## O.K, so what does it mean to say I believe in God?

There are some churches that are adamantly opposed to statements of faith like the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed. They say the Bible is all we must use. They say, Deeds, not creeds! are what's most important. They're not all wrong. The Bible **is** the only rule and final source of information on God.

But what do you mean when you say I believe in God? Muslims believe in God. Buddhists believe in God. Jews believe in God. Most Americans (95%) believe in God. Clearly we're not all talking about the same thing. Yet many of us use the same book. So how do we know what you mean when you say you believe?

That's where creedal statements come in. For centuries, debate has raged over how to answer this issue. We have chosen to answer it by making a statement of faith which explains what we believe the Bible to be teaching about God and His work in our world. These statements make it clear who we believe God to be, who Jesus is, what He has done, and how the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. What makes them especially precious is that they're not just some words some guy thought up on a Saturday night while getting ready for church the next morning. They're words tried and tested by Scripture, by the church, for generations. They are true because they speak from God's Word -- nothing else. They have stood the test of time -- and of trial.

One ancient creed is the **Apostles' Creed**. It's included below. It was used as a basic statement of faith at the baptism of children and adults in the early church. We still use it today at baptisms. A more complex creed is the **Nicene Creed** (also printed below). It was devised to refute a heresy about Jesus which said Jesus was not really God -- He was just kind of chosen by God to die in our place. This is a common heresy and exists today. Therefore the Nicene Creed is also helpful.

Finally, we also have very specific explanations of what we believe. These we call the **Lutheran Confessions**. They are what we confess about Christ and His work. In a time of great persecution, our church fathers stated boldly that we are a biblical, apostolic church that confesses Jesus alone as the only hope of salvation for a world and a people broken by sin. These sessions you are taking are expressions of biblical truth in the light of those statements of faith. This is how we say, I believe in God. We aren't claiming them to be perfect -- no humanly originated word is -- but we do believe firmly that these are the best understandings we can express of the principles of sin and grace that God has revealed to from His Word. This is how God would have us know Him and come into right relationship with Him. We'll continue to explore this in the next session.

**Apostles Creed:**

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Nicene Creed:**

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

# Small Group Study and Discussion II

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
  
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?
  
3. Some have said that the Bible has two main purposes and can be remembered in a simple acronym: S.O.S. This means the Bible is to:
  - a. Show Our Sin
  - b. Show Our Savior

Look up these passages and note whether they Show Our Sin or Show Our Savior

Matthew 5:48

Matthew 7:7-11

Matthew 9:2

Matthew 13:44

Romans 2:1

Romans 3:10-12

Romans 3:22-24

Romans 8:1

1. Why do you think human words and writers about God and His will are necessary and helpful?
  
2. What is the purpose of the Bible?
  
3. Why is it important to read the Bible in light of its purpose?
  
4. Does having multiple translations and large gaps of time in written manuscripts make the Bible less reliable? Why or why not?

# Session 3:

## God the Father: Creator of Life

**Overview:** *We've learned that our knowledge of God comes not from our own reason, but is derived from God's self-revelation. God has made and still makes Himself known to us in His creation. In Genesis 1 and 2 we examine how God revealed Himself to us in this mighty act. He is the author of all life: both physical and spiritual.*

*We continue our discussion about what it means when we say, I believe in God. We shall look at the first article of the Creed which states a belief in God as Father, an almighty Creator of all that is. The Creation accounts of Genesis and why they are significant. What the Creation accounts are designed to do and say; and what they are not designed to do or say. Adam and Eve as the height of God's creation - created in His image.*

### I Believe in God...

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Apostles' Creed*  
*I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of*  
*all things visible and invisible. Nicene Creed*  
*What does this mean?*

#### Key Words

##### *I believe in God...*

It begins with me. It is I and not another, who believes. No one can believe for me. God works faith in the heart of each individual -- precious to Him and with a purposeful design and plan. We live not with an audience of many, but an audience of one: the Lord God Almighty. While it is a statement of faith by the community, it is the gathered assembly of those who trust and acknowledge the presence and actions of God. Some, like Thomas, have said that seeing is believing. This statement reveals the far greater truth that believing is seeing. (Hebrews 11:1) It also is a belief in God, not a belief that God is or does. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder. (James 2:19) Again, knowing about God and knowing God are two vastly different things.

##### *the Father Almighty...*

There is a tension here. On the one hand, we are to call upon God as Father. As Luther notes in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer, God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father. At the same time, we say that this tender Father is also God Almighty -- that He occupies the entire universe and that all we see is His and is at His command. Truly an awesome God -- who chooses to reveal Himself to us in a form we can understand and embrace: a loving Father. This is at times quite difficult for those who have had very negative experiences with their human father. But that which is broken by sin does not deny that God's intent and desire is that all His creation know Him by His everlasting love -- which is what fathers are supposed to model, regardless of how well they have done it in our human experience. Even if our experiences are negative, we can count on God to act and be for us as Fathers are meant to do.



### ***maker of heaven and earth...***

All we see has the thumb print of God. We are all unique, distinct, with a plan and design. All is His, for He has made it -- for us to use, and to glorify and bring praise to Him. Our statement of faith is not merely words on a page, but a lifestyle which helps us see that God is not only the religious or spiritual part of our lives. Rather, God lives in all we do or say; all operates according to His design to achieve His purposes.

**Question:** How do these statements of faith affect our understanding of the following?

- fear, worry, anxiety (Hebrews 13:6)
- greed, covetousness (Matthew 6:31-32)
- pride (Job 31:25-28)
- courage and confidence (Proverbs 3:24-26; Psalm 27:14)
- peace of mind (Isaiah 26:3)
- thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:20)

## **The Creation: Two Biblical Accounts**

As we examine the biblical record of creation, we discover that there are actually two accounts of the same event. Each account appears to have a different focus and theme:

### **Genesis 1 - 2:3**

- Creation of the Universe
- God
- Water must be controlled
- An Imperial command

### **Genesis 2:4-24**

- Creation of the Earth
- The Lord God
- Land that must be watered
- A Master Craftsman

Does this create a dilemma? Does it mean that it is myth? If we operate under the assumption that the account is the very words of God and that their purpose is to bring life to His people, then we approach this uniquely. We assume it is true, and not false, and we seek the truth that it reveals, rather than the falsehood our reason might suggest.

In fact, we should rejoice at the two accounts exactly as we have them. In the first account, it is clearly a record of the works of Almighty God, the maker of all that is. It arise out of nothing -- ex nihilo -- and at the command of His Word. It establishes order and boldly tells that all God makes is perfect and without flaw -- it was very good. In some ways, it is quite impersonal -- revealing the transcendence of an awesome God.

The second account is far more personal. God is a craftsman, delighting in His creation. He forms with His very hands the first man and woman. They have a purpose and design, given by God. He calls them by name and makes them in His image. While the first account shows us God's transcendence and perfection, here we see his immanence and tenderness. This second account introduces us, not only to God, but to us -- the human race. Our race was created perfectly -- in union with God -- designed to know Him and to be fully known by Him. This account is the prelude to all that happens next

## The Purpose of the Creation Accounts

Each account has different designs and purposes. Both are true, and equally valid. We see God both as almighty creator, and as loving father. We see his creation as works of art and also as the focus of His love. When we read the gospel records of Luke and John, we see many similar narratives, yet with some distinct differences. Both are equally true. Both have separate, yet valid purposes.

There is often a raging debate between those who espouse creationism and those who advocate evolution. Can they coexist in the Christian faith and in conjunction with God's Word? Here's the bottom line: the purpose of the creation accounts are to show: Who created, How it was done, and For what purpose. Here's a more comprehensive list of the reasons for the creation accounts. (Thanks to Rev. Harry Wendt and Crossways)

### **What Genesis 1 and 2 confess:**

1. God created the universe and all that's in it.
2. God is a God of order. (materially and spiritually)
3. God created everything good and perfect.
4. Other nations' views are rejected. (apologetics)
5. Human beings are the high point of God's creation.
6. There is meaning to history -- a beginning and an end.
7. People are given an exalted mission. (made in the image of God)
8. God is the creator and thus owner of all things.
9. God cannot be manipulated.
10. Humanity is made in relationship to a loving God who is intimately involved in all aspects of their lives -- and we worship Him.

The fallacy of evolution is the conclusion that we are all here ultimately by random chance. All of Scripture rebels against that idea. We are here according to God's plan and are the focus of His love. Evolution leads to fatalism, the degradation of humanity, and the arrogance of human reason.

Creationism, on the other hand, has always troubled me by insisting upon six, 24-hour days of creation. This reduces God to an hourly employee who punches in at 9 a.m. and works furiously to get everything accomplished before the whistle blows at 5:00! The accounts in Genesis clearly note that God creates everything perfectly, and according to a Divine design, with humanity as the focus of His love and the high point of His creation. God said it, and it was. This truly honors God.

## A Naked Eye Account

If this isn't enough for you science types, then consider this. Perhaps Genesis one and two are simply accounts of the world and its origins as it might appear to the naked eye. Remember, the Bible is not designed to give scientific explanations of the world, but to most effectively convey the love of God to a world broken by sin and separation from God. We do things like this today. Here's an example. Meteorologists regularly refer to the time of sunrise and sunset during the weather report. Are there hundreds of indignant scientists calling the TV stations demanding that he change how he says that? Of course the sun doesn't rise or set. We know the Earth revolves on its axis and that creates the appearance of the sun rising or setting. But we know what it means. It communicates effectively the concepts and information the meteorologist is trying to convey. We understand it. Imagine God trying to explain Himself to human beings. Would it be like trying to explain Mozart, Shakespeare, or DaVinci to an infant? Harder, even? Perhaps that's why Genesis is written the way it is. It would most effectively convey understanding to the most people over the greatest period of time.

## Adam and Eve

No, we are not descendants of apes that began to gain consciousness and thus became what is today called homo sapiens -- thinking man. We believe as Scripture teaches, that God Himself formed and made the original humans: designed to be in perfect union with God, made in His image (His reflection), with a design and purpose -- able to love and choose freely. Note that humans are given life by God's own breath. We are the bearers of eternal souls -- and therefore eternal destiny. We are the height of God's creation, His crowning achievement. Even the angels themselves are below human beings as the focus of His love.

Adam and Eve were object of God's love and were given specific duties: to manage God's creation, and to be fruitful and multiply. (we've managed the multiply part pretty well, I'd say...) They knew the mind of God. They were in perfect union with Him. They had an intimate relationship with the Creator of the Universe. You'll notice that I'm using the past tense in these last sentences. There's a reason for that. We'll explore it next session.

***In order that we finite beings may apprehend the Emperor He translates His glory into multiple forms -- into stars, woods, waters, beasts, and the bodies of men. C.S. Lewis***

# Small Group Study and Discussion III

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

The people of Israel were to be witnesses in the world to the truth of the Lord God. Many pagan religions believed the following things. Fill in the other column from Genesis 1 and 2 as Israel's answer to those false religions.

## ***False religions teach...***

## ***But God has revealed that...***

There are many gods

There are male and female deities

The Creator used preexisting materials

We are to worship sun, moon, and stars

Humanity is locked into a cycle

Humanity is an afterthought of creation  
People can manipulate the gods to move nature to provide her bounty.

God is in some way responsible for the evil in the world

Creation is a result of a chaotic struggle between the gods

1. What is the difference in saying, I believe in God Almighty and I believe in God the Father Almighty?
1. Does believing in God mean that all anxieties go away?
2. Do you have an experience in life that validates the idea that believing is seeing?
3. Read Psalm 104 and rejoice in the vivid pictures the psalmist portrays regarding creation.
4. Read Proverbs 8:22-31 and compare it to John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-17. Who are the writers talking about here?

# Session 4:

## Sin and Temptation

**Overview:** *So far we've seen that God desires us to be in relationship with Him and not simply observe religious rituals.*

*We've also observed that God reveals Himself to us not by our human reason but in His Word: creation, Jesus Christ, and in the Bible. This is an authority we trust and rely in. We learned that God expresses His relationship to us in very understandable terms: He calls Himself Father. We see that His creation was an act of love and human beings the focus of that love: made in the image of God. The creation accounts defend the truth and point out the error in pagan belief systems. All God made was perfect -- in union with Him.*

*But it did not remain so. That which was whole became broken. That which was healthy became terminally ill. That which was free became enslaved. Today we look at sin and its origins. How did we who had perfect life, lose it?*

### An Aside on the Trinity

This is a term found nowhere in Scripture, yet is a fundamental belief and teaching of Christian doctrine. In fact, this is the litmus test for whether a church or denomination is considered truly an orthodox Christian group. When we apply this test to such churches as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, we see that they are not orthodox for they do not agree to this teaching.

But if it's not in the Bible, how do we get it? Why is it important? How can we say it? First, let's be clear on what we are teaching:

#### **1. There is only one God, not three different gods.**

That would be polytheism (many gods). Christianity teaches that there is only one God. See Deuteronomy 6:4 -- what do we call faiths that teach there is only one God?

#### **2. While there are not three gods, there are three persons in one God.**

The three persons we speak of are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is obvious from Scripture that God has chosen to express His divinity to us in a variety of ways. Each is distinct, has a unique focus (Father: creation; Son: salvation; Spirit: creates faith), yet is sublimely united. Numerous illustrations -- all inadequate -- try to shed insight into the relationship of the Trinity. One is the egg. Three parts: shell, yolk, white -- three distinct parts, yet together create a single entity, the egg. All explanations ultimately pale in trying to explain the divine unity.

### 3. Scripture teaches the doctrine of the Trinity.

Let's examine Genesis 1:1-3. (also v.26) Where do you see the three persons of the Trinity?

Father:

Son:

Holy Spirit: (See also John 1. John saw the Trinity in creation. Do you?)

Now let's look at Jesus' baptism. It has been said, *Go to the Jordan River and there you will see the Trinity.* Matthew 3:13-17...

Father:

Son:

Holy Spirit:

### 4. The doctrine of the Trinity is vital to our salvation.

While we will explore this in depth in the next two sessions, it is important to at least note here that if Jesus Christ Himself is not who He claims to be (namely, God Almighty), then our faith is in vain and we are most greatly to be pitied as Paul says. If Jesus Christ was only a good guy, then He could not pay for the sins of all humanity -- only God can redeem His world and everything in it.

## A World of Perfect Order and Harmony

How good was the world God had made? In Hebrew it says, *tov* -- which means exceedingly good. And when God makes something good, it's REALLY good -- perfect, in fact! The same words are used to express perfection in other parts of the Old Testament.

God cared for every aspect of humanity's need. He gave him a significant task. He gave him all the food and shelter he would ever need. He provided a unique and intimate partner for one another -- ones who would actually come to illustrate most closely what God Himself was like in His very nature.

#### **Another aside on the Trinity:**

Read Genesis 2:24. What does it mean to be one flesh and how does it shed light on the doctrine of the Trinity?

Genesis 3 shows us that it was God's habit to come and walk and talk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening. That was the kind of perfect world God had created. It is the kind of intimate relationship God desired to have with His creation.

## The Fall: A Loss of Life

Let's work through the account of how creation was soiled and broken by disobedience. It begins with Genesis 3:1

Notes:

The Serpent

The Command

The Temptation

The Lie

The Sin

The Shame

The Excuses

The Consequence

The Promise

What could God have done in response to Adam and Eve's disobedience? Is God a mean guy?

## The Difference Between Sin and Sins

The word sin is an archery term. It literally means to miss the mark. It means we shoot an air ball in trying to do what God wants. We walk the guy on four pitches. We miss the garbage can with the trash. But there is a difference between sin and sins -- and it's important.

**Sin:**

**Sins:**

Think about why this is an important distinction. Let's look at the confession we say each week in church:

***Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment...***

If all we confess are our sins we can potentially simply get to work on those items and eventually get better and better on our own. But if we recognize that there is actually something fundamentally busted about being human, then we leave everything up to God -- who is the only one with the ability to actually do anything about our sin or our sins.

Note the difference between the confession we just read and this one:

***O God, help me to be a better parent to my children. I'm sorry for the ways I fail to love my children as I should. Forgive me and strengthen me to live like you want me to live.***

What's the difference? What's missing?

## The Devil Made Me Do It!

In our world today we hear lots of noise about being a victim. According to some, everyone is a victim -- the victim of bad parenting, bad social upbringing, codependency, lack of education, money, opportunity, race, gender..... But Scripture might be the last, best place that still talks about accountability and responsibility. While some (like Adam and Eve) might claim, The Devil made me do it! we see that that excuse doesn't wash with God. You see, the Devil's not that strong.

### **An Aside on the Devil.**

*There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.* Preface to The Screwtape Letters, by C.S. Lewis

Let's look at Isaiah 14:12-17. What do we learn about the morning star (Lucifer)?

**Beware dualism!** One of the heresies of this age is to elevate evil and Satan to be the opposite and equal of God and all that is good. This is what yin and yang symbolize: the eternal struggle between good and evil. Now if you want to say that about human beings, OK. Just don't say it about God and our eternal destiny. That has been finally decided by Christ's resurrection on Easter morning. Let's hear again from Lewis:

*The most common question is whether I really believe in the Devil. Now, if by the Devil you mean a power opposite to God and, like God, self-existent from all eternity, the answer is certainly No. There is no uncreated being except God. God has no opposite. No being could attain a perfect badness opposite to the perfect goodness of God; for when you have taken away every kind of good thing (intelligence, will, memory, energy, and existence itself) there would be none of him left.*

*The proper question is whether I believe in devils. I do. That is to say, I believe in angels, and I believe that some of these, by the abuse of their free will, have become enemies to God and, as a corollary, to us. These we may call devils. They do not differ in nature from good angels, but their nature is depraved. Devil is the opposite of angel only as Bad Man is the opposite of Good Man. Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite, not of God, but of Michael.*



## So What Is the Cause of Evil? Who Can We Blame?

Well, there can be only three possible sources. Adam and Eve exhausted two of those in their discussion with God in Genesis 3. So what's left? It's an answer we don't like.

The cry then goes up: But it's not my fault! Hey, even Michael Jackson gets this part right. He sings in *Man in the Mirror*: If you wanna make a change, take a look at yourself... Maybe the more fundamental question is, Why would God make us of such flimsy stuff that we would fall to temptation and choose a way other than God's own way?

## Free Will: The Great Risk

God created people with the ability to choose to disobey Him. Why was this important?

You see, rather than this being foolish of God, it reveals the depth of His love for His creation. We're not made poorly, either. That which is made of simple stuff can only do simple things. The more complex a thing is, the greater its capacity for good or evil. We are the height of God's creation -- the only part of His creation with the capacity to reject His love and choose our own way. This shows just how wondrous we are -- so much so even the angels envy us!

The result of our poor choices is that we live in a world broken by sin. Look again at Genesis 3:16-19. Sickness, death, pain, messed up human relationships, pride, greed, lust... all these are the result of the sin and the sins of human beings. Regardless of what some people might say, there is absolutely no evidence that the human race or the world is getting any better. Oh, we might be more technologically advanced (maybe...) and we may understand psychologically why people are mean to one another more clearly, but that doesn't in any way mean we are getting better as human beings. It is a truth of Scripture and our human experience that tells us that we are broken when we're born and we struggle with sin all our lives. And the consequence of sin is sin, death, and everlasting condemnation -- in short, hell.

**An aside on hell:** Jesus describes hell in several ways. But in all cases, there is a common element. Let's look quickly at Luke 16:23-26 and look for that significant element.

## Original Sin

Another teaching of Scripture is that we inherited Adam and Eve's sin. Every person ever born has been born broken by sin. Nobody starts out clean. Instead we have what theologians call original sin. It means we all are affected by that first, original sin of Adam. No one escapes it. Let's see what the Bible says about it.

Psalm 51

Romans 5:15-17

Romans 3:10-12

Does this seem unfair? Perhaps. As a child, I wanted nothing more than to be able to play professional basketball. I prayed and prayed to become 7' tall. When that didn't seem to work, I prayed to become at least 6'6. No luck. You see there's no way I could be that tall -- it just wasn't what I inherited from my parents. Sin is the same way -- I may not like it, but that is the truth of my condition before God: separated, broken, and unable to save myself.

I think we can understand our sinful state like this. Consider it an S.A. meeting. When we're at church, we're in a Sinners Anonymous meeting. We stand up together and say to God, My name's Ed and I'm a sinner. As long as I'm alive, I'll be a sinner. But I want to be clean and know I can't do it by myself. Forgive me, Lord and wash me. That's why we confess our sin every week. We actually might get better at the sins we do. But our sin always remains. Paul especially gives us insight into this in Romans 7:15 - 8:1

We call this principle *simul justus et peccator*. We are saint and sinner at the same time.

## The Need For a Savior

All this leads us to next session's topic -- Jesus Christ. If it is not abundantly clear that we are desperately in need of a Savior, then it is useless to go on. Unless we are in need, then Christ did not need to come and sacrifice Himself in our place. That's why we spent so much time building the case for sin and a broken world. Here is more biblical testimony as to our need for a Savior:

John 3:3 and Ephesians 2:1

We don't live in a world that needs a band-aid. We don't need a prescription. We don't need counseling. We live in a world and are people that need to be recreated. It appears to me that there are several potential ways we can respond to our situation as God describes it to us in His Word.

|               |                           |         |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------|
| <b>We can</b> | (Judas Iscariot)          | commit  |
| <b>We can</b> | (I'm OK, you're OK)       | compare |
| <b>We can</b> | (Pharisees and 613 rules) | count   |
| <b>We can</b> | (I cannot, O Lord)        | confess |

God does not leave us without hope. He loves His creation so much that He goes to tremendous lengths to buy back that which is His own. We have occupied a deep hole. God is on the way!

# Small Group Study and Discussion IV

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
  
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. Read Luke 15. These are what I call the Lost and Found parables. Note Jesus' passion for that which is lost.
  
2. Do you think that the world's getting worse and worse every day? Why or why not?
  
3. Read the Athanasian Creed on the next page (you don't have to memorize it). Note the many different ways the author uses to express the idea of a Triune God. Note what he is clearly trying to avoid saying, as well.

## The Athanasian Creed

Whoever wants to be saved should above all cling to the catholic faith.  
Whoever does not guard it whole and inviolable will doubtless perish eternally.  
Now this is the catholic faith: We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being.  
For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another.  
But the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty.  
What the Father is, the Son is, and so is the Holy Spirit.  
Uncreated is the Father; uncreated is the Son; uncreated is the Spirit.  
The Father is infinite; the Son is infinite; the Holy Spirit is infinite.  
Eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son; eternal is the Spirit:  
And yet there are not three eternal beings, but one who is eternal;  
as there are not three uncreated and unlimited beings, but one who is uncreated and unlimited.  
Almighty is the Father; almighty is the Son; almighty is the Spirit:  
And yet there are not three almighty beings, but one who is almighty.  
Thus the Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Spirit is God:  
And yet there are not three gods, but one God.  
Thus the Father is Lord; the Son is Lord; the Holy Spirit is Lord:  
And yet there are not three lords, but one Lord.  
As Christian truth compels us to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.  
The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten;  
the Son was neither made nor created, but was alone begotten of the Father;  
the Spirit was neither made nor created, but is proceeding from the Father and the Son.  
Thus there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three spirits.  
And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other;  
but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.  
Whoever wants to be saved should think thus about the Trinity.  
It is necessary for eternal salvation that one also faithfully believe that our Lord Jesus Christ became flesh.  
For this is the true faith that we believe and confess: That our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man.  
He is God, begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father, and he is man, born in the world from the being of his mother --  
existing fully as God, and fully as man with a rational soul and a human body;  
equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity.  
Although he is God and man, he is not divided, but is one Christ.  
He is united because God has taken humanity into himself; he does not transform deity into humanity.  
He is completely one in the unity of his person, without confusing his natures.  
For as the rational soul and body are one person, so the one Christ is God and man.  
He suffered death for our salvation.  
He descended into hell and rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
At his coming all people shall rise bodily to give an account of their own deeds.  
Those who have done good will enter eternal life,  
those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.  
This is the catholic faith.  
One cannot be saved without believing this firmly and faithfully.

# Session 5:

## Jesus Christ -- God With Us

**Overview:** *We live in a broken world. This is a world broken by sin with hurting people and torn relationships. We are unable to save ourselves. And we are the only ones to blame. Yet God in His mercy promised to save us from ourselves and our sin. He promises the hope of eternal life through the redeeming work of His Anointed One: The Messiah. In this session we explore the biblical understanding of what is necessary in one who would be our Savior. Then we look into just who is Jesus of Nazareth. We study His own claims about Himself. We are asked by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am"? We examine the second article of the Apostles' Creed.*

### We Need a Savior!

Remember the movie, Footloose? The theme song was I Need a Hero! That's true for our world, too. We live in a broken world with broken and hurting people. We are completely unable to save or rescue ourselves from the mess we've made. We can try to ignore the mess, or pretend it really isn't too bad, or decide there will be no consequence for the mess, or convince ourselves that we can solve the mess. None of those work. Scripture says plainly that only God can save us and again reestablish relationship with us, as He originally intended in Eden.

Let's look again at the Genesis story of the Fall into sin. Let's focus especially on Genesis 3:15 -- And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

We call this promise the protoevangelium -- the first gospel. It's a blessing in the form of a curse. God made a promise of one who would come and save them from their sin by totally defeating sin, death, and the devil. What do we learn about this Savior from this passage? What do we learn about God?

## A Job Description For a Savior

If you were going to write a classified ad for someone to save you from eternal death and sin -- something you absolutely could not do yourself, what would you write?

### **WANTED: a Savior. Must be...**

The Bible tells us quite a bit about what our Savior will be like. It's overwhelming, in fact. But here's just a start on three vital elements:

#### **1. The Savior will be Fully \_\_\_\_\_**

Genesis 3:15 (seed of woman)

Matthew 4:2 (temptation, able hunger)

Luke 2:7 (birth through Mary)

Luke 22:44 (anguish, as drops of blood)

John 1:14 (Word became flesh and dwelt among us...)

John 19:28 (on cross, Jesus said, "I am thirsty")

1 Timothy 2:5 (...one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus)

Hebrews 2:14 ("Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-that is, the devil")

**Why is this important?**

#### **2. The Savior will be P\_\_\_\_\_ and S\_\_\_\_\_**

**Daniel 9:24**, "...to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy"

**Isa 53:9**, "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth." NIV

**Luke 1:35**, "The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

**2 Cor 5:21**, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." NIV

**Heb 7:26**, “Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.” NIV

**1 Peter 1:19**, “but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

**Peter 2:22**, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” NIV

**Why is this important?**

### **3. The Savior will be**

**Matthew 1:22-23** (Isaiah 7:14) (and they will call him Immanuel"-which means, "God with us.")

**Exodus 6:6**, “and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.”

**Ps 49:7-9**, “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him — 8 the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough — 9 that he should live on forever and not see decay.” NIV

**Rom 5:10**, “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” NIV

**Gal 4:4-6**, “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” NIV

**1 John 1:7**, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” NIV

**Why is this important?**

Any other combination of qualities would be inadequate or inappropriate if God is a God of love and wants us to love Him in return. If God desires relationship with His people, and is He is just and lives by His own rules, and if we are completely unable by our own strength to get right with God, then this is the only option, and Scripture teaches just that.

## So, Who is Jesus of Nazareth?

For generations, the people of Israel had been waiting for the Messiah: the Anointed One of God, the Christ, the Redeemer, the Atonement, the Consolation of Israel... the names go on and on. They expected the Messiah to be greater than King David, to be a conquering hero, one who would establish the nation of Israel as top dog among all their enemies. When Messiah came, there would be no doubt who had the power!

Unfortunately, only a few -- prophets, faithful believers, and students of the Scriptures really saw the true picture God was painting of the Messiah in the Old Testament. This was a picture of a humble Messiah, a servant Messiah, a suffering Messiah.

Jesus caught most of the people completely off guard. He offended many, for they thought they were right with God and were not. He was laughed at by many, for they believed He was powerless, and they wanted power. He angered many, for He struck at the foundation of what they believed to be true about the Messiah and salvation. Just who is Jesus, anyway?

In **Matthew 16**, Jesus gives His disciples the chance to answer that question. Let's see what they came up with

### **Jesus: The Messiah**

Matthew 16:13-17  
(Luke 1:68; Luke 24:1)

### **Jesus: One who Forgives**

Mark 2:1-12

### **Jesus: One who receives Worship**

John 20:24-31  
(Deuteronomy 6:13-15; Matthew 4:8-10)

### **Jesus: One who claims to be God**

John 10:28-30  
(John 5:17)

### ***An Aside on the I AM term used by John in his gospel account...***

Exodus 3:14 -- God gives His personal name

Does John see any connection to Jesus' reference and use of the phrase, I am...?

John 6:35; 8:12; 8:18; 8:58; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1



# Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?

So who do men say that I am? Jesus asks that to every human being today. We are called to ask that question on Jesus' behalf to our world as well. This is where it gets sticky. Most people really like Jesus -- in fact, Jesus gets a 92% approval rating according to George Barna, church statistician. But they dig in their heels and are unwilling to say that Jesus is God. They think He's a really neat guy, but not much more.

C.S. Lewis has insight here:

*I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.*

Then Lewis adds: *You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.* Mere Christianity, p.56

This presents us with what Josh McDowell, a modern day defender of the faith, calls the Trilemma. Here's how he diagrams it: Evidence That Demands a Verdict, p.104

## Jesus Claims to Be God

(Two Alternatives)

### Claims Were False

(two alternatives)

He knew His claims were false

He did not know His claims were false

He made a deliberate misrepresentation

He was a **Liar**

He was a Hypocrite

He was a Demon

He was a Fool because He died for it.

### Claims Were True

He is **LORD**

(two alternatives)

You can Accept You can Reject

He was sincerely deluded

He was a **Lunatic**

## A Review of the Apostles' Creed (2nd Article)

Try to Find the Biblical reference for each statement of the Creed regarding Jesus Christ:

*(I believe) in Jesus Christ, His only Son*

*our Lord*

*Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit*

*Born of the virgin Mary*

*suffered under Pontius Pilate*

*was crucified*

*died*

*and was buried*

*He descended into hell.*

*The third day He rose again from the dead.*

*He ascended into heaven*

*and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.*

*From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

## Small Group Discussion V

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

### **What happened to Christ on the cross?**

Check out these challenging passages to help you come up with an answer:

Psalm 22

Matthew 27:45-46

Galatians 7:13

2 Corinthians 5:21

Isaiah 53

# Session 6:

## Jesus Christ -- The Savior of the World

**Overview:** *What happened to Jesus on the cross? We'll explore the full, literal Gospel in our attempts to answer this question. The Crucifixion -- physically and spiritually. The Descent into Hell -- this obscure doctrine and its significance. The Resurrection -- the ultimate victory! The overwhelming act of love by our God on our behalf.*

### The Full, Literal Gospel - What Happened to Christ on the Cross?

Let's explore the following somewhat startling passages about the passion of Christ:

Psalm 22

Matthew 27:45-46

Galatians 3:13

2 Corinthians 5:21

Isaiah 53

We use familiar terms for the suffering and death of Jesus Christ: sacrifice, death, suffering, atonement, substitution... Unfortunately, none of these terms adequately seem to express what really happened to Christ on the cross. It's almost as if since we know the outcome in the Resurrection, we almost somehow make His death not quite real. But it was all too real. And the terms we use are too sterile, too clinical, too semantic. We need to explore the question to its depths, and so explore the love expressed on that lonely hill outside Jerusalem to its depths as well.

Max Lucado, Christian author, says it well in "*No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*" as he describes the crucifixion:

*The despair is darker than the sky. The two who have been one are now two. Jesus, who had been with God for eternity, is now alone. The Christ, who was an expression of God, is abandoned. The Trinity is dismantled. The Godhead is disjointed. The unity is dissolved.*

*It is more than Jesus can take. He withstood the beatings and remained strong at the mock trials. He watched in silence as those He loved ran away. He did not retaliate when the insults were hurled nor did He scream when the nails pierced His wrists.*

*But when God turned His head, that was more than He could handle.*

*My God! The wail rises from parched lips. The holy heart is broken. The sinbearer screams as He wanders in the eternal wasteland. Out of the silent sky come the words screamed by all who walk in the desert of loneliness. Why? Why did you abandon me?*

Our penalty for disobedience is death. Our well-deserved wages for rebelling against the will of God is eternal condemnation -- separation from our Lord. Jesus takes our place. Jesus Christ is damned. He endures the very pains of hell which was our fate. The Father turns away -- He must, for He sees now only the sin that rests upon His Son. He must be punished, and He is -- with hell and its pains. Let me say it again: the full, literal Gospel is that Jesus Christ was damned for you.

The Cross is the climactic point of human history. All before points to it. All beyond references back to it. The empty tomb is the validation of that sacrifice.

## The Descent Into Hell

We confess in the Apostles' Creed, *(Jesus) suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell.* The Scripture reference for Christ's descent into hell comes from 1 Peter 3:18-20. *He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison...*

Let's place this in the context of the full, literal Gospel. The innocent Jesus Christ was damned. He paid the full penalty for our sin. Therefore, Jesus suffered the very pangs and pains of hell. He was delivered to Satan and his demons as the consequence of our sins. He did not, as many seem to teach, approach hell on a white and fiery steed, his flashing sword cutting bloody swaths through forests of foul demons. He did not lead an assault on hell -- He came bound in the chains of our sin and as the rightful payment for our disobedience. He was consigned to hell itself, and we can shudder as we hear the huge gates slam shut behind Him. All hope is gone. Satan has won. The demons laugh in glee. Life is lost. The Lifegiver has been overwhelmed by sin and death. Satan gloats in triumph.

But not for long! For the requirements of the Law are true and must be paid for: the consequence of sin is death. The wicked can only be redeemed by the blood of the sinless sacrifice. But death gives way to life when the sacrifice is human, holy, and God Himself. The creator can redeem His creatures. The Lord God Almighty alone can purchase back that which is His own. The payment has been made. The sin has been paid for -- at great cost!

And as the chains of sin that bind Jesus begin to melt away the light which can no longer be contained streams forth from His transformed body. He who is the Light of the World brings light, even for an instant, to the darkness which has been always separated from God. Those eternally separated from God see the truth of God's victory in Jesus Christ -- in His death and resurrection they see the final, sealed verdict of their own destiny, and they despair. They who thought just moments before that they had defeated God now see with all too clear realization that His victory is now total and complete. Jesus has burst the chains of sin and now destroys the gates of hell from the inside out. No longer do they need to hold us in terror or despair. Hell, sin, and death now have no power over those who are in Christ Jesus. He begins His journey of glory back to the tomb in which He was laid.

# The Ultimate Victory -- Jesus is Raised From the Dead

Read the Resurrection Accounts in the Gospels:

Matthew 28:1-10

Mark 16:1-8

Luke 24:1-10

John 20

Note the sense of culmination. This is the climax of every story, with only a brief epilogue following the Resurrection of Christ. This is the ultimate victory. This is God's yes to you and to me! Jesus Christ died and rose for all people -- His love is overwhelming. His victory is complete.

Some would seem to teach that this was only a partial victory -- that Christ's second coming at the very end will usher in some kind of new age or millennium. They say we live in wait for the real victory. Then Christ will establish a new kingdom with Christians in charge. Unfortunately, Christ Himself teaches that we rejoice now because *the bridegroom is here*. He says, *My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my followers would fight for me*.

We teach, as does Scripture, that the ultimate victory occurred in the empty tomb and in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no other victory needed. Heaven begins the moment we believe and are thus reunited with our God who so intended from the beginning. Christ's second coming at the end of the age will merely be an unveiling for all eyes to see that what was accomplished on Calvary was truly the victory over sin and death. We are, right now, in the victory time of Christ and His Church. We are yet the church militant, fighting to proclaim to all people the victory which can be theirs in Christ, and Satan is really ticked off and fighting desperately until Christ's return to take as many with him as possible before the game is done. But he is defeated, Christ is victorious and His victory is now ours.

To affirm this, read 1 Corinthians 15: The Resurrection Chapter

What is our faith based upon?

What victory is given?

Is it a partial victory?

What does it say about our new bodies?

Other comments:

We live our lives in the light and knowledge of that victory of Christ Jesus. While the battle rages, the war is won, the outcome certain and sure. There are still real perils. Satan is described as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. But he is limited in power. He is bound and chained, like a rabid dog. If we stay out of the reach of his chain, we are safe. But foolishly venture into his reach and death can be just as real. We can live in confidence and certain hope in the Resurrection of Christ Jesus our Lord. His Resurrection validates every one of God's promises!

## Worship is Easter

Did you know that every Sunday we gather is a celebration of that Resurrection of Christ? We don't celebrate Easter just once a year, but 52 times a year! Every time we gather we celebrate Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the Devil and His gracious giving to us the benefits of that new life. Because He lives, we too shall live.

For that reason, every worship service must include a proclamation of the Gospel, namely, that in Christ's life, death, and resurrection we too have the hope of eternal life which begins this very day. We celebrate, and remember, and praise our God for His overwhelming gift of love in Christ Jesus. It is our hope that worship sends you out with these words on your lips, Wow! What a great Jesus we have! I wonder what opportunities God will give me to show my thanks to Him?

## Small Group Study and Discussion VI

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. Look up the following. What do they say about God's desire for people? About Jesus' death and Resurrection?

Ezekiel 18:23, 32

Luke 15:11-32

1 Timothy 2:4

1 Timothy 4:10

2 Peter 3:9

2. Here's an excerpt from C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. Note the distinct Biblical imagery.

*The fool! she cried. The fool has come. Bind him fast.*

*Lucy and Susan held their breaths waiting for Aslan's roar and his spring upon his enemies. But it never came. Four Hags, grinning and leering, yet also (at first) hanging back and half afraid of what they had to do, had approached him. Bind him, I say! repeated the White Witch. The Hags made a dart at him and shrieked with triumph when they found that he made no resistance at all. Then others -- evil dwarfs and apes -- rushed in to help them, and between them they rolled the huge Lion over on his back and tied all his four paws together, shouting and cheering as if they had done something brave, though, had the Lion chosen, one of those paws could have been the death of them all. But he made no noise, even when the enemies, straining and tugging, pulled the cords so tight that they cut into his flesh. Then they began to drag him toward the Stone Table.*

*Stop! said the Witch. Let him first be shaved.*

*Another roar of mean laughter went up from her followers as an ogre with a pair of shears came forward and squatted down by Aslan's head. Snip-snip-snip went the shears and masses of curling gold began to fall to the ground. Then the ogre stood back and the children, watching from their hiding-place, could see the face of Aslan looking all small and different without its mane. The enemies also saw the difference.*

*Why, he's only a great cat after all! cried one.*

*Is that what we were afraid of? said another.*

*And they surged round Aslan, jeering at him, saying things like Puss, Puss! Poor Pussy, and How many mice have you caught today, Cat? and Would you like a saucer of milk, Pussums?*

*Oh, how can they? said Lucy, tears streaming down her cheeks. The brutes, the brutes! for now that the first shock was over the shorn face of Aslan looked to her braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever.*

*Muzzle him! said the Witch. And even now, as they worked about his face putting on the muzzle, one bite from his jaws would have cost two or three of them their hands. But he never moved. And this seemed to enrage all that rabble. Everyone was at him now. Those who had been afraid to come near him even after he was bound began to find their courage, and for a few minutes the two girls could not even see him -- so thickly was he surrounded by the whole crowd of creatures kicking him, hitting him, spitting on him, jeering at him.*

*At last the rabble had had enough of this. They began to drag the bound and muzzled Lion to the Stone Table, some pulling and some pushing. He was so huge that even when they got him there it took all their efforts to hoist him onto the surface of it. Then there was more tying and tightening of cords.*

*The cowards! The cowards! sobbed Susan. Are they still afraid of him, even now?*

*When once Aslan had been tied (and tied so that he was really a mass of cords) on the flat stone, a hush fell on the crowd. Four Hags, holding four torches, stood at the corners of the Table. The Witch bared her arms as she had bared them the previous night when it had been Edmund instead of Aslan. Then she began to whet her knife. It looked to the children, when the gleam of the torchlight fell on it, as if the knife were made of stone, not of steel, and it was of a strange and evil shape.*

*At last she drew near. She stood by Aslan's head. Her face was working and twitching with passion. but his looked up at the sky, still quiet, neither angry nor afraid, but a little sad. Then, just before she gave the blow, she stooped down and said in a quivering voice,*

*And now, who has won? Fool, did you think that by all this you would save the human traitor? Now I will kill you instead of him as our pact was and so the Deep Magic will be appeased. But when you are dead what will prevent me from killing him as well? And who will take him out of my hand then? Understand that you have given me Narnia forever, you have lost your own life and you have not saved his. In that knowledge, despair and die.*

- Is Romans 2:12 the deep magic of the Law?

*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.*

- What Old Testament passage does this scene remind you of?

- Be sure to read Chapter 15 for the happy ending!

3. We often speak of the free gift of salvation. How is that true? How might you disagree with it?



# Session 7:

## The Holy Spirit -- One who works Faith

**Overview:** *How does God deliver salvation to people? What is the role and work of the Holy Spirit? Why are some saved and not others? (The crux theologorum) Different approaches to the process of salvation and conversion -- which are best supported by the testimony of Scripture? What is faith? What is prayer and why is it important for our relationship with God? How to pray.*

### Let's Review

- What is the difference between relationship with God and religion?
- Upon what source and authority do we base all our teachings on?
- What is our source for knowing God?
- How does God create?
- What kind of creation did God make?
- What is sin? What's the difference between sin and sins? Who's to blame?
- Is there anyone who doesn't need a savior from spiritual death?
- What three elements are essential for a Savior?
- What happened to Christ on the cross?
- Why was death and hell unable to contain Jesus Christ on Easter?
- Who did Jesus die and rise for?

### How Does God Deliver Salvation to People?

We've covered a lot of ground so far. To this point, we've made a case for how our broken world prompted the greatest act of love anyone has ever witnessed -- the birth, life, death, and resurrection of God made man: Jesus Christ. In His willing sacrifice of love, Jesus fulfilled all the dread demands of the Law of God that we could never fulfill. He took upon Himself the full penalty for every human being. He was condemned, literally damned, as a consequence of our sin. He died for every single person who has ever lived and who will ever be born. I've heard it said that you will never look eyes with another person that Jesus did not die for. He died for all.

So salvation is a treasure trove that each person has access to. It's almost like saying that each of us has won the lottery and has a billion dollars in an account with our name on it. How do we access those riches? How do we make use of it? This is the focus of the session for this session. We will study God's delivery system for the riches of salvation won for us by Jesus Christ.

## The role and work of the Holy Spirit

The third article of the Apostles' Creed says:

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.*

Luther in his explanation says: What Does This Mean?

*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

*In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*

*In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.*

*On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.*

### Who is the Holy Spirit?

- Matthew 28:19
- Acts 5:3-4
- 1 Corinthians 3:16
- Psalm 139:7-10
- Titus 3:5

### Why do we need the Holy Spirit?

- 1 Corinthians 2:14
- Romans 8:7
- 1 Corinthians 12:3

### What does the Holy Spirit do?

- 1 Corinthians 6:11
- Titus 3:5-8
- John 3:5-6
- John 20:22-23
- Romans 8:9
- Ephesians 2:20-22
- 1 Corinthians 12

God's Holy Spirit is the creator of faith in the hearts of people. God calls and invites all people to become members of His family. Not only does God achieve victory for all in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ His Son -- He gives it away at no cost to us! We who were unable to earn our salvation have it given to us by Christ. *God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:4*

If this is true... that God in Christ Jesus has worked salvation for all people and redeemed all people from the penalty of sin... and if it is His earnest desire that all people would be saved and ultimately live eternally with Him in heaven... then the question arises: ***Why are some saved and others are not?***

## Why are some saved and not others?

Traditionally, there are three theological approaches to this question. In recent years, a fourth approach has arisen which we must include in our discussion.

**A Scriptural Model:** *The Crux Theologorum* (the cross of the theologian)

You see, it is perfectly logical to our human reason that the reason some are saved and others are not is because of the reasons outlined in the previous diagrams: Either God is to blame, or we don't do enough. But Scripture teaches another way -- one that does not appeal to our reason. Still, as Christians who adhere strictly to the clear teaching of God's Word, we teach only that which God has revealed to us: that it is God alone who saves by the free gift of grace -- and that the only cause of our separation from God is ourselves and our sin. It doesn't appeal to our sensibilities. Either I have to have a choice or a way or a road to walk or I place the blame at the feet of God or destiny or fate. Neither of those are what God's Word teaches. Here's a model to illustrate:

What is the Scripture we have to back this up? Why aren't all saved? In addition to many passages cited in previous sessions (esp. Romans 3, Isaiah 53, Psalm 51, Ephesians 2:8-9...) here are some to check out:

- Matthew 23:37
- Acts 7:51

- Matthew 22:1-10
- Luke 14:16-24

Note that the common thread is a resistance to the tug of the Holy Spirit. It is not in the nature of love to command someone to love you in return. It can only be freely given, in response to invitation. We who have been loved, are called by God's Holy Spirit to love in return. Faith is how God opens our lips that we may say yes to the yes He has already said to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## A Theology of Conversion

I remember once when I was playing softball in the Christian league. Our Lutheran church would regularly play teams from other denominations. Many of those churches were Pentecostal and fundamentalist. These churches regularly teach as a point of fundamental belief that it is our decision that ultimately brings us salvation. Therefore, it's the point of deciding to follow Jesus that becomes the focal point of their energies. So one day at a tournament a guy came up and asked in a very enthusiastic way,

“So, brother, when did you meet Jesus?” Now, being Lutheran, I’m afraid I’m a little bit obstinate so I said, “Well, I was about a month old, and it was at my baptism.” “Oh no, I mean when did you really **MEET** Him in a real way?” “Well, I was about a month old, and ...”. “Look, I’m asking you when you decided to make a commitment to Jesus and give your heart to Him.” Then I stopped and got pretty serious. I said, “I’m sorry, but my Bible says that what’s important in my relationship with Christ is not that I met Jesus, but that **HE MET ME** -- even when I was sinful and in rebellion to Him. It isn’t that I gave my heart to Him, but that He was willing to take my heart home with Him and create a brand new one for me. That I realize now that He did that is a gift from God’s Holy Spirit -- and I call it faith. So please forgive me if I refuse to diminish the glory and honor that is rightfully Christ’s when I won’t tell you when I decided to follow Him -- it matters far more that He loves me.”

Our understanding of how conversion happens arises out of our theology of salvation. It is Jesus alone, Jesus alone, Jesus alone -- through and through from beginning to end. Let’s look again at a passage that speaks to this.

Here’s a literal translation of Ephesians 2:8-9

*For it is by a free gift (grace) you have been saved, through faith -- and even this is not from you -- it too is the gift of God, not by good deeds, so that no one can boast about it.*

Here it says clearly that even the believing is a gift of God. We take absolutely no credit for our salvation. John says: *Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13)* Jesus Himself says, *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit. (John 15:16)*

## God’s Delivery System of Grace

In a later session, we’ll explore this topic more fully. Here let it suffice to say that God’s delivery system for bringing salvation to people is this: His Holy Spirit. Now we learn from God’s Word, that the Holy Spirit works with certainty in several ways: in the use of the Word of God and in the administration of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We **KNOW** that the Holy Spirit is active and can do His job when we use the Bible and when we celebrate the sacraments. That’s why we call what we do in the church Word and Sacrament Ministry. We do that simply because we know that God can work faith and bring people into right relationship with Him when we faithfully and boldly serve and proclaim Him using those tools.

Can God choose to work outside of His Word and the Sacraments? Of course. The Holy Spirit works when and where He pleases. God cannot be put into a box. We cannot limit Him. However, because we know that grace and good news is all about being certain (uncertainty and doubt is a function of the law and our own sin), we rejoice in the certain hope that God does and will act in His Word and by His gifts, the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. God may speak to you in a dream (He has before!) or knock you on the head with a two-by-four, but the rest of us don’t know that! We take great comfort in the certain and solid assurance we have that God works and gifts His people in the reading, teaching, and preaching of His Word and in the waters of Baptism and in the ongoing meal of thanksgiving we call Holy Communion. This is how conversion happens.

God has saved all in Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection. He invites all to be forgiven -- washed clean -- and come into relationship with Him through the call of the Holy Spirit through His Word and the testimony of other Christians. He builds a community of believers called the church where we can grow in our faith and also invite others to hear the good news of Christ Jesus our Savior. He does it all. God works it all. We merely gratefully receive that which He has already done for us.

So do we take great issue with other Christians who say, I have decided to follow Jesus etc., etc.? No! The only reason to take issue is when someone wants to make you do something to somehow earn the love of God -- a decision, a lifestyle, a way of worship, a spiritual gift... For the most part, we don't know any really easy and good way to express that which does not adhere to reason. So when a fellow Christian says, I found Jesus and I praise Him for saving me -- I rejoice with them! Let's not let semantics and words get in the way of that which we share in Christ -- a sure and free salvation. We'll let the pastors and theologians work out the details.

## Faith

So what is faith? The author of Hebrews gives a simple definition: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Hebrews 11:1*

If we unpack that sentence, we can say it another way. Faith is trusting in the promises of God, even when all the evidence is to the contrary. It makes no sense that God would love even me. It makes less sense that He would become a human being and die a criminal's death for those people who might continue to curse Him to their grave. It makes no sense that God would love Adolph Hitler. It makes no sense that there is no expectation of me to fulfill so that I might be deserving of God's salvation. Faith talks a different way. Faith sees Jesus and simply accepts that which He offers -- not because it makes sense, but because of who is offering the gifts to us. I trust God for who He is -- what He has done for me is a great benefit. But I could never say that without the gift of faith.

Why is faith critical? Because without faith, we would be completely unable to see and receive the gifts of God: forgiveness and eternal life. Here's a couple of analogies that might help. In an old Star Trek episode, there were these alien people that were moving super fast -- so fast that no one could see them. The crew kind of knew something was out there, since they could see the effects of the aliens on tangible things, but they had no real idea of what or who was doing it. It was not until they discovered a potion that speeded themselves up that they could see and interact with the aliens.

Imagine also that a starting pitcher from the S.F. Giants said, "Hey, let's play catch. I'm going to throw this baseball to you as hard as I can and you catch it." As he winds up, you say, "Hey, where's my glove?" He says, "Who said anything about a glove -- here it comes!" Well, I'd be running away as fast as I could! It isn't until I put on a catcher's glove (with extra padding) that I could even begin to think about catching a 96 mph fastball.

Faith is like that. God gives it to us (like a potion or a catcher's glove) to enable us to catch and receive His gifts. Without it, we'd have no chance. God knows that and He invites everyone to put on a glove and catch what He's throwing our way -- forgiveness and life. Unfortunately, way too many folks keep pushing God away or holding Him at arm's length. (Even more unfortunately do some Christians and others think they're good enough to be able to catch God's gifts barehanded -- ouch!) Faith is itself a gift from God that makes use of the gift of salvation from Christ. Christ works salvation for all people. The Holy Spirit delivers it by faith in those who believe and trust in the promises of God.

## A Short Section on Prayer

Prayer is also a working of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Romans 8: *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*

Prayer is simply conversation with God. God earnestly wants His children to speak to Him -- sharing hopes and fears, joys and troubles. We are to pray at all times. We are to ask for anything in (Jesus') name and My Father which is in heaven will grant it. Jesus Himself teaches us to pray. (This is why we always pray the Lord's Prayer in worship -- if Jesus tells us to pray like that, then it's the best we could ever hope to do!) Check out the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 and Luke 11.

The Lord's Prayer shows us how intimate prayer is to be with God. Jesus literally says to address our Heavenly Father as Daddy (*abba* was an affectionate, child's way of addressing their fathers). It is never a bad idea to say the Lord's Prayer daily and whenever you pray.

Never be ashamed that you may not know how to pray -- or that you are uncomfortable with praying out loud. Jesus' own disciples marveled at how easily and naturally Jesus prayed. They asked Jesus for instruction. So should we. Here's a little form that may help you with your prayers.

- **Address God** (Heavenly Father, Good and Gracious God, Dear Lord, O Jesus...)
- **Acknowledge what He has done** (...you have given me life and salvation in Christ Jesus...)
- **Ask!** (...help me to know what to say to my boss ...)
- **Why do you want it?** (...so that she might come to know You in a real way...)
- **Align my will to Jesus' will.** (... in Jesus' name. Amen.)

Prayer is one of the greatest tools God gives us. *The prayers of a righteous man availeth much. Ask for anything in my name...* We use prayer formally -- in church, in groups, table grace... We use prayer informally -- with family or friends, spontaneously in tough situations... We use prayer as a matter of simply living -- singing songs, at the stop light, while jogging on the treadmill, in moments of thanksgiving... Don't hesitate to talk to God -- He's always ready to talk with you!

# Small Group Study and Discussion VII

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. What do you think the difference is between faith and blind faith?
  
1. Sometimes our faith may come under sever attack -- by temptation or by the thinking of the world. In those moments of great trial, what do you think of the statement, I'll believe in Jesus even if there isn't any Jesus!?
  
1. Post Retreat Assignment - While we are hesitant to talk about our decision for Jesus or about giving our heart to Jesus, it still is appropriate to speak of a time in your life where spiritual renewal took place. While it may have been spectacular, for most of us it was not -- rather a gradual revelation of the depth of God's love and the reality of relationship. Take a moment to describe here your spiritual journey and how you began to understand in a more mature way how faith became active in your life in Christ. (use more paper if necessary)

# Session 8:

## Baptism: A Birthday Celebration!

**Overview:** *How does God convey the truth of His love for the world in Christ to people? What are the means of grace? What is a sacrament? Why do we call ourselves a church of Word and Sacrament? What is baptism -- its significance -- is anything really happening there? What does baptism give? Who is doing the action of baptism: God or us? Why do we baptize infants -- can they have faith?*

### Delivering the Gift of Faith

Last session we spoke about God's delivery system to get the salvation Christ won for us on the cross to people. Christ died for all, but those gifts of forgiveness and eternal life still needed to be delivered to people. We called that delivery system faith -- the primary work of God the Holy Spirit. In order for us to make use of the great riches of salvation in Jesus Christ, we must be enabled by the Spirit to believe what our Lord has accomplished and given to us (at no cost to us!).

We developed a working definition of faith, namely: Faith is trusting in the promises of God even when all the evidence is to the contrary. (see Hebrews 11:1) That is the privilege and joy of the Holy Spirit. We also discovered from Scripture that the reason some are not saved is not because God is in some way deficient in delivering mercy and grace to people, but that many people still choose to resist His abundant gifts and go their own way. I suppose they feel that the situation they know (even though it may be full of darkness and sadness) is better than the situation God is offering which is unknown. That's where faith acts -- leaping into the arms of God because we have learned to trust His voice. (John 10:27-29)

One summer when my eldest daughter, Michelle, was only 5 years old, we were swimming at a hotel pool. She loved to splash around in the shallow end with her inflatable ring and water wings on. I kept inviting her to come out of the pool around to the deep end and jump in where I was. I promised I would catch her and not let her get hurt. Michelle kept on resisting, even though she really did know that I was able to keep my promise to her. It took almost three different hotel pools before she got brave enough to jump into my arms -- and this was in the middle of the pool and literally within arm's reach! Faith is kind of like that. God invites and promises to take care of us. He offers us an experience that is exciting and full of depth and joy. He says over and over that He will care for our needs and not let harm come to us that He cannot overcome. There may be times when we get water up our noses and chlorine in our eyes, but He is always there to carry us and wipe our tears. All we can do is jump. And that's no great accomplishment -- especially since He's right there to catch us. God cannot jump for us, but He never asks us to jump and then swim to Him. He simply says, Jump! Faith trusts that God will do what He says.



## The Means of Grace

We have also discussed the biblical fact that even faith is a gift from God -- it, like our salvation, is the work and gift of God -- not us! (Ephesians 2:8-9) So we see that God delivers salvation through faith, but how does He deliver faith to us?

Some people seem to think that God simply calls them up on the phone and explains the great details of the Christian faith. Others might imply that they saw an explanation of the Trinity written out in puffs of clouds on a summer day. Or do you think that while you were climbing some tall mountain in glorious sunshine you heard that your sins were forgiven because of Jesus' great love for you? Of course not! While some modern-day folks would have us believe that God spoke directly to them in neon signs, all the rest of us commoners have to rely on different methods to know the will of God.

These methods we call the means of grace. God communicates His saving truth to us by using very definite and understandable means -- the Word of God and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. God sets out His plan of salvation through the Bible. We know that the Holy Spirit is living and active -- desiring to work faith in the heart of the hearer -- through the Holy Scriptures. (Isaiah 55:11, Hebrews 4:12, Matthew 13, 2 Timothy 3:16, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 2:13) That is the first and primary way that God works faith in people -- through the testimony of His Word. (Remember, we know the Word of God to not be limited to the Bible alone -- we also know His Word to be in Creation and especially in the Divine Logos, Jesus Christ. But in this section we particularly mean the Bible when we talk about the Word of God.)

The second way that God chooses to reveal his love and mercy and so work faith in the hearts of people is through what we call the sacraments. This is another means of grace.

## What is a Sacrament?

The word does not appear in Scripture, but is rather a word that theologians use to express a sacred action. In other words, a sacrament is an action of God that delivers His gifts of forgiveness and eternal life to people. Let's contrast a similar word: sacrifice. What's the difference? A sacrifice is an action of people toward God. We can call our worship an act of sacrifice. Our tithes and offerings are a sacrifice. Our time, our singing, our talents -- all actions of sacrifice. It can be seen in the animal sacrifices made in the Old Testament. A sacrament, however, is not something we do -- but is something that God does on our behalf -- a gift.

We define a sacrament in the following way:

1. It is a sacred act instituted by Christ Himself. (Matthew 28:19-20; 26:26-28)
2. It uses a visible element or means. Baptism and the Lord's Supper
3. It gives the gift of forgiveness. (1 Peter 3:21; Matthew 26:28, Titus 3:5-8)

Because of this definition, we limit the sacraments we observe to two: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Let's take a moment to see how the Bible, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper all resemble one another:

1. All three say to the repentant believer: Your sins are forgiven.
2. The Bible conveys this message through written words.
3. Baptism and the Lord's Supper convey this message through visible words.

Through the means of grace, God wants to declare human beings forgiven. He also uses those means to change and transform sinful people from an old way of living to a new way of living. He wants us to stop wanting to serve only ourselves to serving God and others. (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:20-32)

**(An Aside:** How do you know whether or not the church you are attending is truly Christian and teaches according to God's Will? We believe that Scripture teaches that church is defined by all those who are believers in Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord. Now, since we cannot read the hearts of people, we look for identifying marks of the church. We call those marks the means of grace. Therefore, we believe you can identify church when you see the Word of God preached in its purity and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion administered as Christ Himself asked us to do.)

## Top 10 Questions Regarding Baptism

### **The Word of God – His Command...**

Matt 28:18-20, "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

### **The Word of God – His Work...**

Titus 3:5-6, "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior..."

### **10. What is baptism?**

It is an act of God that unites us with the risen Christ and makes us members of God's family. It is not just plain water, but it is water included with God's command with His word. (When God speaks, it comes to be...see Gen. 1:1 ff)

### **9. What are the elements of baptism?**

Baptism joins water and God's word, to give us life, forgiveness, and salvation.

God is present at the calling of His Name, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

### **8. What does the word "baptize" mean?**

Literally = "to wash" In baptism God is "washing away our sin"

It is also used in Scripture to mean, sprinkling.

Titus 3:5-6, "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior..."

## 7. What are some of the special symbols we use to celebrate baptism?

-The sign of the cross is done to acknowledge that God is the one present and has given his own Son to die for us.

-A white garment is sometimes worn to signify for our culture purity and the new life clothed with Christ.

-A baptismal candle may be lit each anniversary of the baptism as a way of teaching and reminding us of our relationship with God and His family the church.

-A baptismal banner is used to share the great news of baptism with the whole congregation!

## 6. What is the role of the parents, sponsors, and the church community?

The role of the parents

Parents are called by God to care for the spiritual, as well as the physical needs of their children.

The role of sponsors

Sponsors help the baptized person bear witness to Christ. They live the Christian life as an example. They pray for the baptized person to lead a Christian life.

The role of the church community

Prayer, support, and encouragement

**5. Who is to be baptized?** Many historical churches baptize babies: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist. However the Baptist and Church of Christ do not. Why does the Lutheran church baptize infants?

From the writings of the early apostles we have indications that the church has baptized babies. In fact up to about the 1500's the teaching of infant baptism was not disputed. We believe that if God was so opposed to infant baptism, we would have a clear word in Scripture about this.

a. The apostles baptized entire families

St. Paul baptized

The household (family) of Stephanas 1 Cor. 1:16

Lydia and her household Acts 16:15

Keeper of his family and all with him Acts 16:33

St. Peter baptized

Cornelius and all who were with him Acts 10:48

b. God's command. Babies belong to "all nations"

(4 x's Jesus includes "all" or a form of "all"...)

Matt 28:18-20, "Then Jesus came to them and said, "**All** authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of **all** nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey **everything** I have commanded you. And surely I am with you **always**, to the very end of the age."

Infants, adults, middle ages “all” included in “all”  
Blondes, brunettes, etc... “all” included in “all”  
This passage does not speak of exclusion, but of inclusiveness

c. The Need for Baptism

The Scripture make plain that we are all by nature sinful and in need of forgiveness.

Rom 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

John 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.”

Eph 2:3, “...Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

We will not automatically choose God and His way. We will “naturally” oppose God. A child left to “decide” for himself/herself will oppose God --- every time.”  
That is the power and effect of sin in our lives.

d. The forgiveness won for us so many years ago on the cross is given us in the gift of baptism.

Titus 3:5-6, “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior...”

Joel 2:28, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people....”

Eph 5:26, “to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word...”

(Another aside!: Why Baptize Infants?)

There are churches that loudly criticize us for baptizing infants. Their reason: babies cannot have faith. I suppose that would be true if you define faith as something we do -- a series of doctrines we learn and confess before God and men. Fortunately for us, that’s not how Jesus or God’s Word talks about faith. Faith in the Bible is always a gift from God: a seed, a rock, a foundation -- it’s rarely something that takes place in our head; rather it is a relationship God builds in our heart. Faith is far more a heart thing than a head thing. That’s why baptizing babies is a wonderful object lesson of the grace of God. There is no way a baby can stand up before the congregation and declare the six chief parts of Christian doctrine. The only way that child can be forgiven and received into the family of God is by the sheer gift of God’s grace and the faith He chooses to work in the baby’s heart. Is God able to do that? Of course. Are we able? Of course not. Baptizing babies is the single best illustration of grace that we have, namely that we can take absolutely no credit for our faith or salvation to ourselves -- it is the gift of God -- so that no one can boast.

**4. Can an infant believe?** A related question that helps answer the previous question  
The question indicates just how ingrained “works righteousness” is in our lives!  
The question assumes that there is something the infant, or adult for that matter, must “do” as if “believing is a doing thing” to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a totally foreign concept in Scripture!

Eph 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast.”

**3. A better way of asking this questions is: Can God pour out His Spirit on and infant? On an adult?**

Joel 2:28, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people....”

Faith and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is something the Lord works in our hearts through the powerful working of his Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 12:3, “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.”

The power of baptism doesn't depend on the person being baptized but on God!

**2. Why do some churches insist on full immersion?**

Lutheran churches are not opposed to immersion as a possible method for baptism. In fact the scripture addresses this imagery.

Rom 6:4, “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

The idea of going down into the water and rising up certainly is a great visible image of what God is doing in baptism. We who were dead in Christ now rise to newness of life.

Col 2:13, “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,....”

However the overriding passage for me in this area is this one.

1 Jn 4:18, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, ...”

In my mind God would not have us even doubting for one second His love for us. Doubts about God's love are created when we wonder about the “correct” amount of water. The Lord's love for us is not an area that we even need doubt. When one begins to “measure” aspects of faith we get in trouble. How much water is “enough?” --- A cup, a gallon, 10 gallons, 50 gallons, a river, an ocean, a bigger ocean? When one measures there is room for doubt. The Scripture uses the word "baptize", it can mean immersion, but it can also mean pouring or sprinkling! God is at work through the water (any amount), not the water through God. The water doesn't use God! God uses the water!

## 1. Why do we speak of baptism as being born again?

John 3:3-5, "In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

This has got to be one of my favorite aspects of sharing the incredible wonder of God – as creator physical life and of spiritual life – same God! ...

...Illustrate how one enters physical life "through water" (amniotic fluid...)

God give us new life, (spiritual rebirth) through water as well. The water used in baptism!! The imagery is so prevalent in Scripture. The children of Israel were delivered from their enemies, the Egyptians, through water (Red Sea) and also entered into the Promise Land through water (the Jordan River). One can not but make the connection to God "delivering" us to the promise land (heaven) through the waters of holy baptism! Wow! What an awesome God. Pick a date for baptism!

## For Further Reading re: Baptism

### **Are Babies who are not baptized denied eternal life?**

The Roman Catholic Church invented limbo to answer this question. (Invented -- there is no Scriptural evidence for such a teaching.) This is a place that's not quite heaven, but certainly ain't as bad as hell. (It's not hot, anyway.) Unfortunately, it is dangerous to make up something that you cannot back up with God's revealed Word. All we can say with confidence is what God has said to us in His Word.

Therefore, this is what we know. We know that babies who are forgiven in the waters of baptism can have the sure hope and confidence of eternal life. We don't know the fate of unbaptized babies. Mark 16:16 says, He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that does not believe shall be condemned. Note that it does not say, He that does not believe **and is not baptized** shall be condemned... The thief on the cross entered paradise without the benefit of baptism. Others have died tragically on the battlefield without the privilege of baptism. Remember: it is faith in Jesus Christ which saves us -- baptism is an action of God which says yes to us in Christ Jesus. Baptism is a means of grace which conveys faith and forgiveness to the individual.

### **An Old Testament Parallel to Baptism**

Another reason we consider the baptism of infants valid is because of the Old Testament practice of circumcision, which is a parallel to baptism in many ways. Circumcision was done to male Jewish babies eight days after birth. (Oddly enough, we have discovered in modern times that the period of time from 6-10 days after birth is the single best time for a human being to recover from an injury and stave off infection because of the high level of antibodies in our blood.) Babies became sons of the covenant/promise -- B'nai B'rith. They were not asked to confess their faith -- but by this action God adopted them into His family and they wore that sign forever. Now they could walk away from that covenant relationship, but the action had been done with certainty years before. It is not the action of God that is in question, but the response of His people.

## It's Either Something We Do, or Something God Does

Ultimately, it boils down to this. If Baptism is something we do, then it cannot bear with it the gifts of God. It cannot have forgiveness. It could not have eternal life. Those activities are limited to God. If it does not bear those things, then why bother? As some kind of public confession? That can be done without baptism, couldn't it? And if it is dependent upon my action, then it is filled with doubt and uncertainty.

But if Baptism does bear with it forgiveness and eternal life, then it is the activity of a gracious and loving God, and we come to the water with joy and certainty. For if God is the one doing and acting in those waters, then we know that our forgiveness and relationship with Him is certain and sure. There is no doubt! That's the gift of the Gospel and of grace.

## What about Godparents or Sponsors?

We believe that raising up a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ is a task that we can use every bit of extra help we can get. So when a baby is baptized, we invite the parents to choose one or more people to be sponsors of that baptism. It used to be that sponsors or godparents were chosen in the event of an untimely death. Today that is a legal and civic issue for families. For spiritual purposes, we encourage parents to choose Christian sponsors (that's essential -- it seems rather silly to have a non Christian or unbeliever as a sponsor) who will both pray for the parents and encourage the child as they grow in their faith. Remembering them on their baptismal birthday with a card or Christian gift is a wonderful way to say to both parent and child: We really care.

## Small Group Study and Discussion VIII

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. Read with caution James 2:14-24. It might seem at first that James is saying that we are saved by our good works. We know that is not the case, based on the rest of the testimony of Scripture. What is he arguing about then? Could he be saying that faith is not just something you know in your head? What is he saying?
2. Some churches teach that you are not baptized unless you are fully immersed. What do you think?
3. What kind of obligations and responsibilities come with the baptism of infants? Of adults?

# Session 9:

## The Lord's Supper -- God is With Us

**Overview:** *God delivers salvation to people by working faith. God works faith through the Holy Spirit, who comes to us with certainty in the Word and in the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. The Lord's Supper -- a taste of heaven and a foretaste of the feast to come. What was the first meal God gave that bore salvation? How does Jesus keep His promise when He says, I am with you always. ? What do we mean by the real presence of Christ and why is so important? What gifts come with Holy Communion? Who receives the sacrament worthily? How do I prepare to receive the Lord's Supper?*

### What's Your Picture of Heaven?

As we've discussed in previous sessions, eternal life and heaven are best defined as being in perfect and eternal union with our Lord. Hell would be the opposite of that, or, eternal separation from a loving God and Father. Still, humans need hooks to hang ideas on and God gives lots of insight into what heaven will be like. The fundamental point is that we'll be with God. But what will we be doing? If you like to take your scriptures quite literally, it appears that... well, let's look it up for ourselves.

- Isaiah 25:6-8
- Isaiah 55:1-3
- Isaiah 65:11-13
- Matthew 8:11
- Matthew 22
- Matthew 25:10
- Luke 14:8-10, 15
- Luke 22:30
- Luke 24:28-35
- Revelation 7:15-17
- Revelation 19:9

Yes, we'll be with God, but significantly, we will be eating with God! The picture of heaven is one that includes feasting and partying in His presence. God plans to have an eternal, heavenly banquet -- and we are invited and honored guests of our Host -- Jesus Christ.



## Why Was Eating so Important?

In an age when billions of dollars are spent each year to lose weight, we might wonder why this eating idea is so significant in the biblical account of paradise. Consider the context for a moment. When was the last time you wondered where your next meal was coming from? Even if we have gone through some pretty tough times, it always seems that there's at least a can of chili or tuna fish in the back of the cupboard. In our age of refrigerators, freezers, canned goods, and freeze-dried foods, we have little worries about food spoiling. Even more importantly is the opulence we live in. At no other time in human history have the people of the world (and in particular, the USA) had as much food to gorge ourselves upon. Only in the most extreme of circumstances do we worry about food.

Not so in Jesus' day. In an age without freezers or canned goods, people cooked and ate what they would eat in a day. Preservatives were limited to what could be dried or salted. Poverty and famine were not surprises, but regular occurrences. In the ancient world, your next meal was a very real concern. It was probably what occupied many people's primary thoughts during the day. So when Jesus speaks about eating at the heavenly banquet, about offering the bread of life and living water so that we don't ever have to thirst again, and when He chooses to actually break bread with the tax collectors and prostitutes of society, He was making a very significant statement.

So feasting is a very important image, for Jesus' time, and for today. We love to eat. It is an experience that touches all our senses. It sustains life. It's appropriate that God would speak of eating spiritually even while He provides for our physical eating as well.

## The First Meal -- Passover

The first meal in which God demonstrated His love for His people was at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. In the process of freeing His people from slavery in Egypt, God sent a final devastating plague upon Pharaoh and the land of Egypt. He sent the angel of death, who would take every firstborn son unless the blood of a lamb was found covering their doorposts. If the blood of a lamb was present, the angel of death passed over their home, and they were spared. This final devastation brought about the release of Israel from Egypt, and the Exodus to the Promised Land was begun. The account can be found in Exodus 11 and 12.

- Read Exodus 12
- What parallels can you find between the Passover and Jesus' sacrifice for sins?

## God is With Us -- What Shall We Do?

When the King arrives, what do people do? They party! They have a huge feast! They plan for a major reception with dancing and the finest foods. Did you think it would be any different when Jesus came? Jesus is also a King, coming to redeem that which is rightfully His. In the presence of the King, it is right and good to feast! Check out the following to see this principle:

- Matthew 9:14-15 (what do you do when the bridegroom arrives?)
- Mark 5:1-8 (is Jesus a King?)
- Revelation 3:20 (when do we get to eat with Jesus?)

The banquet begins when the bridegroom arrives. The feasting begins when the King has come. The hymn writer says, Jesus has come and brings pleasure eternal, Alpha Omega, beginning and end; Godhead, humanity, union supernal, O great Redeemer, you come as our friend! Heaven and earth, now proclaim this great wonder: Jesus has come and brings pleasure eternal! It is upon Jesus' arrival that the hold of sin and death begins to unravel. Therefore, as long as God is with us, we shall celebrate His coming and His victory over death. A banquet is a good way to celebrate!

## In the Upper Room -- The Last Supper

On Thursday, only about 18 hours before Jesus' crucifixion, our Lord gathered His disciples into an upper room to celebrate the Passover feast with them. It was at this time that He instituted for His believers the meal which we call Holy Communion. Read the accounts:

### **Matthew 26:20-30**

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me. 22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, Surely not I, Lord? 23 Jesus replied, The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born. 25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, Surely not I, Rabbi? Jesus answered, Yes, it is you. 26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take and eat; this is my body. 27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the(n) covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. 30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

### **Mark 14:17-26**

17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me one who is eating with me. 19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, Surely not I? 20 It is one of the Twelve, he replied, one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born. 22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take it; this is my body. 23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 This is my blood of the(n) covenant, which is poured out for many, he said to them. 25 I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God. 26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

### **Luke 22:14-23**

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. 17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me. 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. 21 But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. 22 The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him. 23 They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

## **1 Corinthians 11:23-29**

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

- Note the parallel to Passover and its symbolism. What can you identify?
- Why do you think it is called Communion?
- Another name for the Lord's Supper is the Eucharist. It means thanksgiving.
- What mysterious activity seems to be going on here?
- What is Jesus giving in this meal?

Remember this: The banquet begins in the presence of Christ. Those that are in Christ experience NOW the benefits of the heavenly banquet. That is one of the great gifts of the Lord's Supper.

## **Holy Communion is a Foretaste of the Feast to Come**

A Christian author has said, In the Lord's Supper we begin to do on earth what we will do in heaven. What's happening is not just a symbol or a remembrance like a birthday or even like Christmas. What's happening is real, it's ongoing, it bears God's gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. What's happening strengthens us to like according to the forgiveness we have just received. What's happening is REAL.

Around Easter each year I notice the little boxes of Whitman's samplers at the check-out stand in the supermarket. Each little box has about 4 pieces of candy. Now it's just a sampler -- just a taste of what the bigger boxes are like. What they're trying to get you to do is anticipate just how great it would be to buy the 5 pound box of those caramels! Now if you're like me, the sampler just isn't enough -- especially when you're sharing it with your wife and two kids. But in any event, the candy that you eat is very real - - it adds pounds, just like the real thing. It also tastes great! Problem is, just one or two pieces is only a taste, only a sampling of the bigger and greater thing.

Now Holy Communion is kind of like that. However, instead of some measly 5 pound box of candy being the real thing, heaven is like a semi backing up to your house and dumping tons and tons (a never ending supply!) of candy into your garage! Communion is a foretaste of the feast to come -- a very real taste -- but just a sample, to be sure. We begin to do on earth what we will do in Heaven.

## God is With Us -- The Real Presence of Christ

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus makes a wonderful promise in addition to giving an awesome command. While we are called to make disciples in all the world, Jesus promises to be with us always, to the very end of the age. What a comfort! How does He keep His promise?

We believe that the Lord's Supper is one of the most significant ways that we know Jesus is keeping His word to us. In Holy Communion, we speak of receiving Christ in His body and in His blood for the forgiveness of sins and for the strength to live Christ like lives. We speak of Christ being truly and physically present in the bread and wine of Communion. Christ Himself says, This is my body; This is my blood. Does He mean it? Was He kidding? What's the significance of believing that Christ is truly (and not symbolically) present within the bread and wine of the sacrament?

There are two primary reasons this is such a comforting teaching:

1. If Christ is present in the sacrament, then we see that He is truly with us physically, as well as spiritually.
  2. If Christ is present in the sacrament, then we can be sure that the gifts He gives are truly there as well. (forgiveness and eternal life)
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:16. How does this speak to the real presence of Christ?
  - Is it fair to say, Communion is Jesus? In what way is this true?

## Differing Views

The following may be helpful in understanding what other churches believe about the sacrament of Holy Communion:

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:16, *Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?* We participate in the body and blood of Christ, for where He is, there are His gifts as well.

This is so important, we should say it again:

Because Jesus Christ is truly and physically present in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, we can be sure that His gifts of forgiveness and eternal life are certainly there as well.

Again, as we said last session, the Gospel is all about certainty and grace. The Law is about measuring and doubt. We should have absolutely no doubt that what God promises to give us in the sacrament is real and true and does what it says. We can only be completely certain that God's gifts are present if God Himself is present. The same is true in Baptism. God in His Holy Spirit is carried with the Word of God and the water to bring forgiveness and life eternal to the one being baptized. So it is with the Lord's Supper. Christ gives Himself in His Body and in His Blood to bring the certainty of forgiveness and life eternal to those who receive Him in faith.

## Who Receives the Sacrament Worthily?

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:27, *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* This sounds pretty frightening! An older translation says, *they eat and drink damnation upon themselves...* It appears that if we are unworthy, we might be damned by coming to the altar of God. It seems a terrible paradox: that which offers life and forgiveness also bears the threat of condemnation? Let's examine it for a moment.

Who is worthy to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion? Who is worthy of forgiveness and eternal life? As we've learned: No one! *There is none righteous, no not one... All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.* Clearly no one is worthy of the sacrament.

But then again, we ARE worthy to receive. Why?

- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- Galatians 3:26-27
- Romans 3:21-24

We are not worthy to receive Christ in the sacrament because of anything that we have done. Rather we are made worthy by Christ Himself! So we boldly and gratefully receive the gifts which God offers to us, His children.

In short, those who are worthy to receive are those who have faith in Christ Jesus and His love for them. (Remember, even that faith is a gift from God -- no boasting allowed -- except in Christ!) So how do we determine those who are to receive the sacrament?

## Communion is a Family Meal

God invites those to receive the sacrament who are members of His family -- those who believe in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins. Luther says it this way: That person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins..." For the words for you require all hearts to believe.

God's family is defined by faith. The church is all those who believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord. The Lord's Supper is a family meal designed to benefit those who cling and trust in the promises God has made and the gifts He has offered there. Therefore it is of no benefit, and actually can be a farce or sham, if one approaches the altar without faith in Christ Jesus and what He is giving. This brings us back to the one who receives worthily. No one is damned twice as the verse might imply. Rather, eating and drinking unworthily means that the separation from God that already exists is simply confirmed publicly in coming to the altar to take that which you do not believe in.

As we saw last session, Baptism is that which brings us certainly into the family of God. It works faith, gives the Holy Spirit, and forgives sins. For this reason, we say that Baptism is a prerequisite for receiving the sacrament. Anyone who wants the gifts offered in the Lord's Supper would also certainly want the gifts offered in Baptism. A despising or rejection of one is a rejection of the other. The Lord's Supper is a family meal -- the family of faith. The gifts it brings benefits those who believe. We rejoice in its power and its promise!

## Proper Preparation

So why don't we give communion to infants? Some churches do, relying upon the gift of faith given in Baptism for those children to receive to their benefit. We, however, understand Paul's words, A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup to mean that one should be able to recognize our need and prayerfully ask for our Lord's forgiveness and strength. This implies that we instruct those who want to attend the Lord's Supper. At Emmanuel we do so through a 1-3 year process of teaching the faith, usually for grades 6-8. For adults we use this retreat or other classes for instruction as a means of preparing communicants to receive. Private instruction is also acceptable. In any event, the sacrament is designed for those who rely solely on Christ for forgiveness and life eternal.

Here is a 4-step process of self-examination before receiving the Lord's Supper:

1. I am a sinner in need of forgiveness and recognize and acknowledge that I cannot save myself.
2. I know and believe that Jesus alone is my hope of forgiveness and eternal life.
3. I believe that the body and blood of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is truly present in the bread and wine I receive, and therefore my forgiveness is certain and sure.
4. I resolve to honor my Lord and thank Him by seeking His strength to change my sinful life.

Now receive with joy -- Christ is with us!

# Small Group Study and Discussion IX

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. How often should a person receive the Lord's Supper? Are there pitfalls in too often?
2. In what instance or instances do you think Communion should be refused to a communicant?
3. What is an appropriate demeanor for taking communion? Should we be sad about our sin? Happy about our forgiveness?

# Session 10:

## A New Life in Christ

**Overview:** *God brings us His gifts in His Word, in Baptism, and in Holy Communion with certainty. Does that change us in any way? How we live? How we interact with others? Because we are forgiven freely by Christ, does that mean we can do anything we want? What is our response to God's love for us in Christ Jesus? Is the Law of God good and beneficial to us? What is the distinction between Law and Gospel? What does it mean to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ?*

### Justification and Sanctification

Now here's two churchy words! These are terms rarely used in normal conversation, but in Scripture they appear over and over in very significant ways. What do they mean?

#### Justification

This means that God sees me just as if I had never sinned because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Justification = just as if I'd never sinned. But a more accurate use of the word comes to us in legal terminology. The word is literally a legal term used in the courtroom. Justification means being declared innocent before God. Even though everyone in the room knows that we are guilty as charged, our Lord decrees not guilty! because of Jesus Christ and the faith which we have in Him. Justification is a free gift, a charity case, a free ride, a present, a paid debt, a get out of jail free card...

Justification is how we begin our relationship with Christ. Before we are called to do any good works, we are invited by God to acknowledge our need, repent, and seek His forgiveness. Justification realizes that we do not deserve, nor can we earn any piece of His good and gracious love for us. In justification we give absolutely all glory to Christ and to Christ alone. *Let he who boasts, boast in the Lord! 1 Corinthians 1:31*

#### Sanctification

This is a term that comes out of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. A sacrifice was something set apart for God and His divine use. The word holy means set apart. So if something was sanctified, it was holy and set apart. We have come to see holy as meaning holier than thou or somewhat snobbish. But that's not what it means in the Bible. Rather, as people who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we are set apart by God for God. We are called to be the light of the world and a city set on a hill. We are to shine like stars in the universe that we may declare His wonderful works. Peter says, *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* Christians are called to live holy lives that honor Christ and His love for us. We are to be different from the world in which we live. People should be able to know that we walk to the beat of a different drummer.

Now please understand that we're not talking about being geeky or prudish or just plain odd ducks. Christians, perhaps more than anyone, can talk real joy in life! We are forgiven and free. God is in control. My destiny is certain and sure. I know that someone outside of me loves me not for what I've done but simply because of who I am. I know that I am precious to God. The world is in its entirety a gift from God and so is every breath I take. (We could go on and on.)



The problem that we run into comes when these two terms are mixed or they get the wrong one first. Jesus especially found this to be true in His day with the Pharisees. Too often people think that if they simply get their act together (sanctification) then God will love them (justification). Many people won't come to church to receive God's gifts (justification) because they think they're not good enough (sanctification). Others think that, It's all well and good that Jesus loves me and died for me (justification), but I have to somehow finish the job He began. (sanctification)

So often people think that even sanctification is something I get to do after God has saved me. Even sanctification (being made holy, being conformed to Christ's likeness, being transformed by the Spirit of God) is the work of God. Mother Teresa used to say, God is the power source. I'm simply the conduit of His love. We pray that we may be made effective, efficient, and gentle conduit for His grace and mercy in our world.

Justification (God's love) always comes before sanctification (good works). No works are good in God's eyes unless they are done in response to what He has first done for us. What Jesus is calling for in the gospel is that people simply allow God to love them unconditionally. What follows is our thank you to our Lord. First, the love of God. Then comes our loving response. It's never the other way round.

Let's look at some passages to illustrate this:

| Which category do these fall under? | <b>Justification</b> | <b>Sanctification</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Galatians 2:16                      |                      |                       |
| Matthew 5:48                        |                      |                       |
| Ephesians 2:8-10                    |                      |                       |
| Matthew 13:44                       |                      |                       |
| Matthew 16:16-17                    |                      |                       |
| Luke 6:36                           |                      |                       |
| 1 John 2:6                          |                      |                       |
| 1 John 4:7, 11                      |                      |                       |
| James 2:14-18, 26                   |                      |                       |
| Philippians 2:15                    |                      |                       |

## Is the Law of God Good?

So is there value in the Old Testament? Isn't it filled with Law? Why should I bother with the 10 commandments if I can simply get forgiveness? Why should I struggle to live a godly life?

This was a challenge in the early church. The gospel was so sweet, so full of joy and forgiveness, that people took it to mean they could live any way they wanted. Everything was open to them. Some even thought it was okay to worship idols as long as they still also worshipped Christ! Even in the time of the Reformation cheap grace became a common term for those who planned forgiveness for things they would do.

So what's the value of the Law? Why bother with the 10 commandments and the Old Testament? Several things to consider:

1. The Bible of the New Testament church was the Old Testament. If it was good enough for them, it should be worthy of our study and esteem as God's inspired word.
2. Jesus Himself says that not one jot or tittle (period or comma) should be added to the Law, the Prophets, and the writings.
3. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to do away with it.
4. The Old Testament points to Christ as our Savior.
5. The Old Testament is filled with the gracious promises of God.

Let's take a moment to look at a brief portion of Paul's argument concerning the value of the Law of God in Romans.

Romans 5:1-11 (justification)

Romans 5:20-21 (the purpose of the Law)

Romans 6:1-14 (sanctification arises out of justification)

You might say that Law is kind of like having to wear a cast on a broken bone. It is not easy, there are times when we struggle with it, and the itching gets really bad -- but ultimately it is something given to us for our good so that our healing can be clean and complete.

## The Purpose of the Law

The scriptures speak to us about three general purposes of the Law:

1. **To curb outright and general sin in the world.** (a universal moral law)  
(Exodus 20:1-21, Galatians 5:16-21, Colossians 3:1-10, Romans 1:20, 1 Timothy 1:9-10)
2. **To reveal our sinfulness and need for a savior.** (a mirror)  
(Romans 3:20, Galatians 3:19, Psalm 38:4)
3. **To guide us in our lives.** (the new obedience)  
(Galatians 5:22-26, Colossians 3: 12-25, Philippians 2:15, Romans 12:1-2)

## Law and Gospel

Here then are some terms which distinguish the work of the Law from the work of the Gospel:

| Law         | Gospel        |
|-------------|---------------|
| Demands     | Invites       |
| Burdens     | Frees         |
| Condemns    | Forgives      |
| Pays        | Gives         |
| Conditional | Unconditional |
| Measures    | Overflows     |

## How then shall we live?

The picture we get from Scripture of the devoted Christian differs greatly from the picture many people have of that in our world. A guy once said to me, I'd never become a Christian. I'd have to give up all the stuff I love to do and I'd never have any fun. It'd be a bore.

Nothing is further from the truth! When God is in control, we get on a roller coaster ride that sends us flying through life. Living by faith and serving others brings a fulfillment that I didn't think was possible. Sharing the gospel with those who don't know is a real excitement. Giving generously, honoring my wife, and telling my kids about the love of Jesus is not a joy stealer, but a real harvest of rejoicing. There are challenges, to be sure, and some activities of life are out of bounds. (like stealing, pornography, social climbing, and sleeping with other people's wives...) But on the whole, this is an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. The world and the life I live takes on a whole new perspective in Christ.

This is where faith gets back into the picture. (as if it ever left...) None of this makes sense without the eyes of faith. Again, it is faith that grasps the gifts of God and makes them understandable to the individual.

# Life by the Spirit

## What is the Church?

Growing up, the plainest answer I would have given you would have been: The building down the street that I go worship in. That's the church, isn't it? Not according to God's word. It's natural for us to think of the building that we call church as church, but that is far too static a term to use for that which God is active and present in and among.

The church, in its simplest sense, is all believers in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. CFW Walther, a church theologian from the 19th century writes,

*The church in the proper sense of the term is the congregation of saints (ecclesia), that is, the aggregate of those who, called out of the lost and condemned human race by the Holy Spirit through the Word, truly believe in Christ and by faith are sanctified and incorporated into Christ.*  
**Church and Ministry, Thesis 1**

Let's look at some scripture to help us get a biblical picture of what the church is and should be:

1 Corinthians 12:12, 27

Galatians 3:29

Ephesians 5:22

1 Peter 2:9

## What is the Mission of The Church?

If the church is all those who are believers in Christ, set apart as His bride, called the body of Christ, a royal priesthood... That's all great. It tells us who we are. But now what are we to do? What's our mission? Our purpose? Let's look at some more scripture:

Matthew 28:16-20

Acts 1:8

John 20:22-23

Luke 15 (Luke 19:10)

Luke 22:19

Luke 4:18-19

Philippians 2:15

1 Timothy 2:3-4

- What appears to be God's passion?
- What is the primary task of the followers of Jesus Christ? (the church)

# Small Group Study and Discussion X

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. Let's do a little activity with Law and Gospel. Read the Law statement and then rewrite it to make it a statement somewhat more Gospel oriented.

*Why don't they give more? They make enough.*

*Can't she control her kids in church!*

*How much do I have to do?*

*I have to go to church now.*

*I don't know anyone at this church.*

*I can do that job better than they can.*

*It's not my job.*

*I never received a thank you for that.*

2. Are good works necessary for salvation? Are good works necessary?
3. We say that mixing Law and Gospel is a grave error in theology. Why might it be so dangerous?
4. What do you think is meant by the term cheap grace? How is that a correct term? How is it incorrect?
5. Read Romans 7 and 8 to further delve into Paul's ongoing challenge of living the new life in Christ. What are his struggles? Are they yours as well? In what does he place his hope?

# Session 11:

## The Worshiping Community of Faith

**Overview:** *Exercising our faith muscles in worship. What is worship and why is it important? The difference between sacrificial and sacramental elements of worship. The Church Year. Symbols, colors, candles... What is the Church? What role does the local congregation play in the bigger picture of the church of Christ? What is the purpose and mission of the church? Why join a church? What role does membership play?*

### What does the Church do?

Before the year 313 A.D., the church existed in competition with the world and society in which it lived. But in the reign of Constantine, this all changed. Briefly stated, Christianity went from being an outlawed, on the edge kind of group to being the officially sanctioned state religion. This had some very good and some very bad results. The good was that people flowed into the church. Literally hundreds of thousands of souls came to know Jesus through the free course and preaching of the gospel. Churches were built and the charitable activities encouraged by Christ were sponsored by the state. This resulted in what we called Christendom. Essentially the state and the church were pretty much the same thing.

This state of affairs lasted until about the 1950's. Since that time, Christendom has effectively ceased to exist. No longer are clergy regarded highly in our society. No longer are Christians seen as the moral conscience of society. No longer are the values espoused by Christ and taught in the Bible the values which are shared by the society as a whole. Church attendance and membership are not seen as givens, but are -- more and more -- seen as anomalies in a busy and active life. The church is seen as irrelevant to the basic daily needs of people. We are literally in direct opposition to a majority of what is happening in our world. Christianity is now back to the fringe of the culture. Not unlike the time of early Christianity -- only now instead of Pre-Christian culture we are living a time as Post-Christian culture. This has enormous implications for the church today.

This can be blamed on a number of factors. One would be that while we were in charge we forgot what our mission was: to make disciples of Jesus Christ. When the church and the state are the same thing, that mission kind of fades into the background and becomes less evident and urgent. But now we see the mission of the church coming again into the foreground. It is clear that the biblical vision for ministry must again be championed by the church and by Christians everywhere. Our task is to make fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

## Making Disciples of Jesus Christ

Now don't get me wrong. It is and always will remain the task of **God the Holy Spirit** to make disciples. We don't create or work faith. We don't give grace. God does. And God uses means of grace. (Remember that session?) Through Word (personal and corporate) and Sacraments God works faith in the heart of people. And we are those who deliver that Word and Sacrament ministry to the world in which we are placed. God privileges us with the opportunity to bring His good news of salvation to a world hurting and broken by sin. We have the joy of seeing people enter into saving relationship with Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior. God uses us. Can you even believe it?

For too long have we abdicated that position. For too long have we chosen to simply open our doors and hope that people will come hear about Christ. This worked well for the time of the church in the culture of Christendom. But for too long now we've twiddled our thumbs and wrung our hands waiting for a culture to "come" to church when church is not even on their radar. It is time for the Lord's people to act in a new way for the new day we live. Our call today is to be less an attraction model and more an equipping release model of ministry. We will not just work on in-house items hoping all will come to us. We will recognize that God is calling His church today to be incarnational – out and into the fiber and flow of our culture and world to be an influence where people work, live, and go about life. Now is the time to act in a new way with the strength of the "old, old story message of God's love in Christ Jesus." This message will never change!

*There once was a group of people who loved to fish. They fished in the rain. They fished in the sun. They fished in the morning, the afternoon, and night. They fished when they barely had enough money to buy worms. They fished and they fished. They loved to fish so much, that they almost cleaned out the lake. There were fewer and fewer fish to catch. So they began to fish less and less. They began to gather at the store and talk about fishing. You know, the good old days. They wrote books on fishing. They devised instructional videos. They taught classes on fishing. They knew all about fishing. They never did it anymore.*

*When asked why they didn't actually fish anymore, they said, It's too cold. or It's too wet. or Do you really think I want to put a worm on my hook and then clean those smelly old things? It had become too much trouble. Others said, There just are so few fish left in our lake. But when it was pointed out that in the years they had just talked about fishing, lots of fish had moved back in and fishing could be really great, they disputed the figures and walked off in a huff. They knew lots about fishing, but stopped doing what they loved to do.*

The same can be said about the church. We know all about fishing. We just rarely do it. Perhaps even more critically, we perhaps have even stopped learning about fishing. Now we talk about what makes us healthy, wealthy, and wise. We may even have been guilty of seeing the church as a social gathering or a country club. That's not what the church is designed to do. The church is designed to fish and create more fishermen.



## ***Being a Disciple of Jesus Christ: Outreach***

Therefore, the primary function of the church is to bring people into relationship with Jesus Christ as their Savior and as the Lord of their life. About this there can be no dispute. Absolutely everything else that the church does serves this ultimate purpose. Let's check that out for a minute. How do the following church activities serve the ultimate purpose of outreach?

***Worship:***

***Sunday School and Bible Classes:***

***Small Groups:***

***Youth Program:***

***Retreats:***

***Choir/Praise Teams:***

***Fellowship events:***

***Stewardship:***

***Physical Plant:***

***Personnel:***

This requires an entirely different way of looking at the church and its activities. We see that the church does not exist simply to make me feel good about myself. It doesn't exist for me to just be a fat and happy Christian. We are not called to be spectators in the game, but players on the field and soldiers in God's army. The church exists not only for me, but also primarily for THEM. For all those yet to know Jesus. This changes our approach to doing ministry in the church. Let's think how it changes how we do what we do:

***Worship:***

***Sunday School and Bible Classes:***

***Small Groups:***

***Youth Program:***

***Retreats:***

***Choir/Praise Teams:***

***Fellowship events:***

***Stewardship:***

***Physical Plant:***

***Personnel:***

## ***Being a Disciple of Jesus Christ: Inreach***

Now don't get me wrong. The things the church does year after year are right and good. We need fellowship events, and choirs, and men's clubs, and ladies groups, and quilters.... But what we need to do is encourage those groups to assess how they are going about meeting the mission of the church. We need to ask each ministry area to measure their mission against these three areas:

1. Are disciples in Jesus Christ being made?
2. Are additional leaders being developed for the mission to multiply and expand?
3. Is this area of ministry growing in influence  
    "That which is healthy... grows  
    That which grows ... matures  
    That which matures...reproduces!  
    That's life at its best as God created it!!  
    That's the life of the church at it's best too – as God designed it to be!!

We need to see the joy and importance of simple ministry to fellow Christians. In the midst of our striving to bring people into relationship with Christ, we also need to grow them up in that relationship. We need to teach and instruct in biblical knowledge. We must care for those who are hurting -- financially, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. We have to provide a nurturing community for our children, our family, our elders, and others. We need to have a place that is safe and secure, a refuge and haven from the challenges of daily living. We need a place to simply worship and pray. All of those activities are a natural extension of our relationship with Christ. And yet even all those activities should spur us on to offering those same benefits to those who do not yet know the joys of being in the family of God. They too should share in those benefits in a form that touches into their world and not just a draw to ours.

So we see that the purpose of the church is to make disciples: both by reaching out to those not yet in relationship with Christ and to those who know Christ and need to be built up and nurtured in the faith. You cannot have one without the other. Both are dependent upon the other.

## **The Celebration of the Community: Worship**

Worship is the high point of the activity of the Body of Christ. Here we receive the gifts God offers to us in His Word and by His sacraments. Here we praise Him for those gifts. Here we lay our sins and receive His forgiveness. Here we join together in confession and adoration. Here we learn of His ways through His Word.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (the work of the church)

Matthew 16:13-20 (to whom Christ gave His gifts)

Worship has a specific design. It continually builds toward a final climax which results in the celebration of the sacrament. But getting there is half the fun. It is in the elements of worship that a cycle is developed. It is a cycle between the actions of God and the responses of His people. A seminary professor has said that worship is simply us saying back to God what He has first said to us. What God gives to us we will call the sacramental elements of worship. And the times when we respond to His gifts we will call the sacrificial elements. Let's examine the service based on those criteria.

- What God does for us. (sacramental) - Our response to His gifts. (sacrificial)
  - The Invocation (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14)
  - Songs, hymns, psalms (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19)
  - The Word of God (Colossians 3:16)
  - The Sermon (2 Timothy 3:16; 4:2, Acts 2:42)
  - The Offering (Malachi 3:10, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
  - Creedal Statement (1 Timothy 1:18-19, 2 Timothy 3:14)
  - Confession (1 John 1:8-9)
  - Absolution/Forgiveness (Psalm 103:8-12, 1 Timothy 1:15-16)
  - Prayers and Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9, 1 Timothy 2:1, Ephesians 6:18)
  - Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, also Matt 26, Mk 14, Lk 22)
  - Great Thanksgiving (Luke 2:29-32, Psalm 107)
  - Benediction (Numbers 6:22, 2 Corinthians 13:14)

There is no established pattern for worship in Scripture. There is no set style which is more or less appropriate for worship. What is critical is that we say back to God what He has first said to us. We praise Him for His goodness. We talk to Him in prayer. We long to learn of Him. We receive His gifts. We share with others in the community. That is done best by the very words of God. It is vital that we proclaim His goodness and we seek His forgiveness, that we praise His works and acknowledge His love to us in Christ. In worship we recognize our sin and we seek God's grace in Christ. The style matters little, unless it distracts us from God and His Word.

For this reason, there are many differing styles of worship. They range from country and western music to Bach and Handel on the organ. Some are somber, some are almost a party atmosphere. All to me seem appropriate as long as they serve as an avenue to confess our sin, proclaim and receive God's inestimable grace in Jesus Christ. All must be founded and grounded in God's Word. All must focus us on God's activity and our grateful response.

Now of course, some folks are going to hate rock and roll. Others would never darken the doorways of a church that plays only organ music. Our task is to bring to people the opportunity to worship in such a way that they can have an encounter with the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. To that end, it appears that we should try to have numerous options for people. That is what Luther and the Reformation strove to do -- offer numerous user-friendly forms of worship that reflected the spiritual needs of the people while retaining the truth and tradition of God's Word.

# The Church Year

This also is not in the Bible. However, it is a useful tool for worshipers year after year to experience the ebb and flow of the life of Christ and to hear many differing Bible passages. The assigned reading almost force the preacher to touch on many differing topics (some quite difficult or obscure!).

The year is divided into two parts, nearly equal in length. The first half of the year begins with Advent and proceeds through the life of our Lord Jesus until its conclusion at Ascension. The second half of the year covers the life of the church and appropriately begins with Pentecost and ends just before Advent. And even though we move from season to season, the church celebrates on every Sunday of the year the Resurrection of our Lord! Every Sunday is a celebration of Easter.

## **The Life of our Lord**

|           |           |                 |
|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| Advent    | 4 Sundays | Purple or Blue  |
| Christmas | 2 Sundays | White           |
| Epiphany  | 7 Sundays | White and Green |
| Lent      | 6 Sundays | Purple or Blue  |
| Easter    | 7 Sundays | White           |

## **The Life of the Church**

|                         |            |       |
|-------------------------|------------|-------|
| Pentecost               | 1 Sunday   | Red   |
| Sundays after Pentecost | 25 Sundays | Green |

## **Certain Festivals**

|                 |          |       |
|-----------------|----------|-------|
| Reformation     | 1 Sunday | Red   |
| Christ the King | 1 Sunday | White |
| Holy Trinity    | 1 Sunday | White |
| Transfiguration | 1 Sunday | White |

The paraments that a pastor often wears bear the colors of the season. Purple reminds us of Christ coming as a King, and is also a color of penitence and preparation. White is a color of celebration and high feast days, like Easter! Green tells us of the life which God's Holy Spirit gives to us and to all living things. Red speaks of the flame and work of the Holy Spirit.

Symbols also play a part. Fishes, crosses, Greek letters, triangles, and the like all seek to add to our understanding of what is happening in worship. All serve as worship aids.

## Membership vs. Discipleship

In this age, joining is something that is less and less attractive to people. 50 years ago, joining was vitally important. Just note the decline in such things as Lion's and Kiwanis clubs, unions, and Boy Scouts. Churches fared much the same. Again, for too long churches simply assumed that others would be willing to join because it was simply the thing to do. Now a case must be made for joining anything. Happily, there are excellent reasons to become a member of a church.

It is the local congregation's privilege to do the work of Christ in the community and for its people. Churches are called by God to be beacons of light to the world in which they are placed. We are called to be salt and light to our neighborhoods and communities. Churches seek to do God's work in unique and dynamic ways, with the people and resources God provides. Each one is distinct. It is important to become a part of what God is doing in an intentional way. A church provides that. However, people sometimes mistakenly think that membership is the important thing. It's not. Being a member of a church in no way creates a relationship with God. Being a member of a church does not make you a Christian. Being a member of a church says very little about what you believe, as research shows even loyal denominational members differ widely even on somewhat fundamental doctrinal teachings.

But being a member of a church can also serve some very important purposes. Rather than creating a relationship with Christ, it becomes one way of expressing your relationship with Christ. For example, a member of the Lutheran Church is saying certain things about the Bible, about salvation, and about grace. A Catholic says certain things about confession, good works, and worship. A Baptist says one thing, a Presbyterian says another. Those things are simply informational, not relational. But more important things come with membership. The most important is commitment. It's kind of like the difference between getting married and living together. When you're married, you can have certain expectations of your husband; and a husband can have certain expectations of his wife. In a relationship like that, families are built and nurtured, commitments are made and followed through on, and when opportunities or challenges arise, they can approach them with joy and confidence. A common vision and mission can be eagerly worked upon if there are many members sharing that vision. If there were no members with commitment, the great challenges of ministry might prove to be too much for them, and others would be left twisting in the wind.

A final benefit of membership is accountability. When we have a commitment of membership, we can at least assume that we believe the same thing, and can therefore entrust the tasks of leadership and ministry to those who share the same beliefs. Otherwise we might find ourselves with teachers teaching whatever they wanted, since they never made a commitment to the same mission and vision.

Membership is valuable only insofar as it assists the individual in growing in their relationship with Christ, and as it aids the congregation in meeting ministry goals which honor Christ and build the Kingdom of God.

Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
A Church with Small Groups

## The Definition of a Church with Small Groups

### Relationship

Like the human body, which is made up of millions of cells (the basic unit of life), the life of the cell-based church is also in its cells (small groups in community). In this context, believers actively seek a relationship with God, each other and with unbelievers.

Through these committed relationships, members encourage each other on to maturity in worship, edification, accountability and evangelism. This is true community.

### Meetings

The focus becomes the cells. It is nearly impossible to nurture committed, effective relationships in the context of a large group. The cell becomes the place where the community and relationship, ministry and evangelism develop most naturally and powerfully (Acts 2:42-47). A gathering of the cells for celebration (Sunday Celebration Worship Service) joins each cell together as part of the larger body and provides corporate worship and times of teaching that bring the balance to the small group.

### Every Member in Ministry

A fundamental belief is that all Christians should be growing in discipleship by being mentored and mentoring someone else. This provides discipleship and rapid growth at all levels of maturity.

Mentoring helps to fulfill the biblical mandate for all Christians to be equipped for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11,12) and multiplies the discipleship process down into the cell. The result of all-member equipping and ministry is a natural lifestyle evangelism. Also the concept of every member in ministry encourages and validates those with a sense of market place ministry, breaking down the sacred/secular divide.

## Emmanuel Lutheran Church's Core Values *Core values determine our actions at Emmanuel*

**Connecting**—We experience the best life has to offer in an environment of healthy, lasting relationships.

**Faith**—We love God with all our hearts, minds, strength, and souls and place him first in every aspect of our lives.

**Love/Acceptance**—God wants all people to know and love him; so all people are always welcome here.

**Forgiveness**—Our church is a hospital for sinners, where forgiveness, love, and trust are shared with one another from the giver of forgiveness, our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Nurture**—We use our gifts to serve others and to provide ways for our worshipers to grow spiritually.

**Change**—We are a mission station, an outpost of Christian community. As such we embrace change that will lead to spiritual growth, that will meet the needs of our community, and that embraces a contextually relevant worship style.

**Healing**—We strive to bring wholeness to lives that are fractured and broken by acts of kindness and the proclamation of the Gospel.

*"It is easy to think that the Church has lots of different objects — education, building, missions, holding services. The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men to Christ, to make them little Christs (or, Christians). If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose." — C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity.*

**LCMS**  
**Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod**  
**What's That?**

**Who Are Lutherans**

Today, there are 66 million Lutherans belonging to 250 different autonomous Lutheran churches around the world. The largest numbers of Lutherans are to be found in Germany, the place where the Reformation took place during the early part of the 16th century. The 9.5 million Lutherans in North America belong to 21 different Lutheran church bodies. The largest of these at 5.1 million is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, with 2.5 million baptized members, ranks as the second largest Lutheran church body in North America and the 11th largest denomination in the USA. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has 410,000 members and is the third largest Lutheran Church in the United States of America. You may read an article titled "An Introduction to the LCMS."

**Our History**

On April 26, 1847, 12 pastors representing 15 congregations signed a constitution that established "The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States." Today, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (the name was shortened on its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary) has 6,150 congregations served by more than 9,000 professional church workers. You may also view additional statistics about the Synod.

**One People--Believing**

The word "Synod" in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod comes from the Greek words that mean "walking together." It has rich meaning in our church body because the congregations voluntarily choose to belong to the Synod. Diverse in their service, these congregations hold to a shared confession of Jesus Christ as taught in Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Some are located in rural areas, others in inner cities. Some are large; others are very small. Most use English, but some offer worship services in Vietnamese, Spanish, Laotian and other languages.

**One Mission--Reaching Out**

The Synod has a long history of reaching out to others. LCMS World Mission trains, sends, and supports called career missionaries and appointed volunteer missionaries throughout the United States and in various countries throughout the world where there are mission stations, partner churches or mission relationships. Ministry to African-Americans has been a solid part of the Synod for more than 100 years. In addition, our Library for the Blind produces sermons and devotional literature, and of the approximately 90 deaf congregations maintained by all religious denominations, more than 50 are members of the LCMS.

**One Message--Proclaiming**

Well known for its emphasis on Biblical doctrine and faithfulness to the historic Lutheran Confessions, the Synod also seeks new ways of proclaiming the Gospel. Concordia Publishing House, whose Arch Book Series for children has sold more than 55 million copies, is the nation's fourth-largest Protestant publisher. A pioneer in radio and television work, the Synod operates the world's oldest religious radio station, KFYO, headquartered in St. Louis, Mo. Its program, "The Lutheran Hour," produced by the Synod's International Lutheran Laymen's League (LLL), has been aired in North America since 1930. The Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML), which came into being in 1942, serves as the Synod's auxiliary for women and has been a leader in supporting missionary outreach in many areas.

**Partnering** Unlike many other churches, the LCMS has never been involved in a major merger. Internationally, the Synod conducts missions or maintains relations with churches in more than 50 different countries. It is a member of the International Lutheran Council, but it does not belong to the Lutheran World Federation, to the National Council of Churches or to the World Council of Churches.

**Educating** The Synod has always had a great emphasis on education. In fact, its earliest congregations built schools before they built churches! We have 10 colleges, two seminaries, 91 high schools and the nation's largest Protestant elementary school system. The LCMS has congregations in all sections of the United States, but the heaviest concentration of its membership continues to lie in the Midwest.

### **Caring**

The Synod also shares God's love with others through LCMS World Relief and Human Care by meeting human needs (physical, emotional, and spiritual) of those who are suffering. We have built and help to maintain a large network of Lutheran hospitals, nursing homes, human care and adoption agencies to serve the sick, the elderly, the victims of abuse, those struggling with addictions, and many others coping with difficult situations and transitions in life.

**Serving** LCMS District and Congregational Services serves with districts in assisting its congregations to develop and foster vibrant ministries to bring the saving, life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world through its five ministries: Children, Family, Outreach, School, Stewardship and Youth.

Being "Lutheran," our congregations accept and teach Bible-based teachings of Martin Luther that inspired the reformation of the Christian Church in the 16th century. The teaching of Luther and the reformers can be summarized in three short phrases: **Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone.**

**Grace alone** God loves the people of the world, even though they are sinful, rebel against Him and do not deserve His love. He sent Jesus, His Son, to love the unlovable and save the ungodly.

**Faith alone** By His suffering and death as the substitute for all people of all time, Jesus purchased and won forgiveness and eternal life for them. Those who hear this Good News and believe it have the eternal life that it offers. God creates faith in Christ and gives people forgiveness through Him.

**Scripture alone** The Bible is God's inerrant and infallible Word, in which He reveals His Law and His Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the sole rule and norm for Christian doctrine.

**Who is Jesus?** For more than 2,000 years people have asked the question, "Who is Jesus?". We were not present when Jesus lived on this earth, but in the Bible we have the record of his birth, life, death on the cross, and resurrection. Study of the Bible, God's Word, will enable you to seek out the answer to this age-old question.

**What does "Synod" mean?** The word "Synod" in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod comes from Greek words that mean "walking together." The term has rich meaning in our church body, because congregations voluntarily choose to belong to the Synod. Though diverse in their service, these congregations hold to a shared confession of Jesus Christ as taught in Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions which they believe are a correct interpretation and presentation of Biblical doctrine. Contained in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, these statements of belief were put into writing by church leaders during the 16th century. The simplest of these is Luther's Small Catechism. The Augsburg Confession gives more detail on what Lutherans believe.



## California-Nevada-Hawaii District (one of 35 districts in the LCMS)

The members of the California-Nevada-Hawaii District are congregations and ministries located within Nevada, Hawaii and the northern portion of California.

**Web Site:** <http://cnh-lcms.org>

**President:** Dr. Robert D. Newton

**District Office:** 2772 Constitution Drive, Suite A Livermore, CA 94551-7566 Phone: 925-245-4000

Fax: 925-245-1107

**E-mail:** [rita@cnh-lcms.org](mailto:rita@cnh-lcms.org) **Web Site:** <http://cnh-lcms.org>

### Profile:

|        |                     |
|--------|---------------------|
| 186    | Congregations       |
| 50,129 | Baptized Members    |
| 37,528 | Communicant Members |
| 35     | Preschools          |
| 32     | Elementary Schools  |
| 3      | High Schools        |

### International Missions

LCMS World Mission has more than 110 years of experience in foreign mission fields. The LCMS commissioned it's first overseas missionary in the 1890s to India.

Today, LCMS World Mission works with partner church bodies and emerging church bodies worldwide. We have active work or mission relationships in approximately 85 countries. For administrative and strategy purposes, international fields are divided into four regions, including Africa, Asia, Eurasia, and Latin America.

In each region, LCMS World Mission has identified "priority platforms" through which our work to proclaim the Gospel, plant churches, develop leaders, and direct resources are connected:

- **Africa**--Reaching people through human care ministries
- **Asia**--Reaching people through education ministries
- **Eurasia**--Reconnecting people to their Christian heritage
- **Latin America**--training national missionaries

In countries where a national church body is well established, LCMS World Mission seeks to lend its partnership to build the capacity of the national church, its leaders and members to enable it to be a missionary church itself. This may take the form of offering personnel to train leaders, or consulting services in areas of outreach or development where the national church has identified a need, or offering financial assistance to complete projects which contribute to building a healthy, self-sustaining national church.

In places where there is no established church or the number of unreached people is relatively high, LCMS World Mission offers career and volunteer personnel, financial, and other resources to establish Lutheran communities of faith, and to train national leaders, who will in turn evangelize new communities and train new leaders.

# Small Group Study and Discussion XI

1. This insight was learned or reconfirmed today...
2. If all of this is true, what does it mean for my life?

If time allows ...

1. How do such things as Bible study, Sunday School, choirs, praise or drama teams, and fellowship activities help us to accomplish the mission of the church: To make disciples?
2. We said worship is saying back to God what He has first said to us. Can you see how that may be true in our worship service? Check it out next Sunday.
3. How is God calling you to not only be a more fully devoted follower, but also how is he calling you to make disciples?
4. Next time you are in church, look around to see the symbols of our faith. If you don't know what they mean, ask someone who might know. (Note other symbols at others times.)

Assignment - As we complete this course, it would be well for you to take time to write out your spiritual journey. Tell of your relationship with Christ and how it has developed and changed or grown. This is an extremely useful tool for you use in sharing your faith with others.

# Session 12 – Discipleship or Membership – Yes!

## A Fully Devoted Follower of Jesus Christ

So how should I live? If I'm not worrying about doing good things to get right with God, and if Jesus has already saved me and loves me just as I am, then what does that imply for how we live day by day? As we've already seen, we are justified (made right with God) solely by the person and work of Jesus Christ and God's Holy Spirit through faith and grace. So what kind of life are we called to live? (sanctification)

Let's dialog a bit about what are some elements of discipleship that scripture teaches us:

1. W\_\_\_\_\_   
*I rejoiced with those who said to me, Let us go to the house of the LORD. Psalm 122:1*
2. Regular c\_\_\_\_\_ attendance   
*This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. 1 Corinthians 11:24*
3. Small G\_\_\_\_\_ as well as private Bible Study (and prayer)   
*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:42 (see also Psalm 119)*
4. Knowing and using one's spiritual gifts in s\_\_\_\_\_.   
*If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 4:11*   
*Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 11:27*
5. F\_\_\_\_\_ involvement   
*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42*
6. 10% g\_\_\_\_\_ (t\_\_\_\_\_) or striving toward that goal   
*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the LORD Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. Malachi 3:10*
7. S\_\_\_\_\_ your faith in Christ with others.

*Answers: Worship; church; groups; service; fellowship; gifts, tithe; share*

*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth. Acts 1:8  
Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing ... and teaching... Matthew 28:19*

Please understand that these are expectations we see from scripture that lead us into a more fully mature relationship with Christ. It in no way implies that any of us do all these things perfectly all the time -- we don't and we cannot in this life! And so it is not a church's expectation, and certainly not God's expectation that we do these things to get right with Him or that these are qualifications of a Christian or even a good churchgoer.

Rather, we rejoice with the opportunity to grow in our relationship with Christ in such a way that we are strengthened in our faith and so that others may come to know Him and the kingdom of God may be nurtured and built up. What a joy that God chooses to use His redeemed people to do His work in this world! And we have the privilege to participate in His activity. That is the joy of discipleship, and we all seek to continually grow in these areas to the praise and honor of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We see from the testimony of scripture and human history that when people follow a course of discipleship that includes these activities, they will grow in their relationship with Christ and be strengthened in their faith. And while we also see many tangible benefits from a lifestyle that truly seeks to honor God and thank Him for His love, that is not the motivating factor for living a Christ like life. A truly bold and Christ-like life includes not only the crown of glory but might very well include trial, temptation, sacrifice, and suffering. When we are bold with the truth of the gospel, the world and its people -- darkened by sin -- struggle with Christ's exclusive claims.

In short, it is our privilege to live in a way that rejoices in God our Savior. It is a joy to live in a way that says thank you to a good and gracious Lord. It is a celebration to live free from sin and the burden of the law and simply ask God, "What would you have me do today that others may see your love and rejoice?"

We rejoice with the apostle Paul, *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*  
*1 Corinthians 15:57-58*

**Turn with me now to the "Discipleship Covenant"  
And some final  
"Where do we go from here" thoughts!**

Dear Friends,

It has truly been a pleasure having you participate in Emmanuel's "Discovering what the Bible Says" process. I pray that we have accomplished the following goals:

1. 1) An overview of the Biblical narrative  
"God at work uniting all things in heaven and all things on earth under one head, Jesus Christ!" (Ephesians 1:9)
1. 2) A closer look at God's tremendous call to you in relationship as His disciple
1. 3) An overview of some key teachings on the Lutheran faith including Sin/Grace, Law/Gospel, Baptism/Lord's Super, Justification/Sanctification, Worship/Witness, Discipleship/Membership and then some...!
1. 4) A beginning sense of welcome, fellowship, and community in the body of Christ called Emmanuel Lutheran Church!

**Welcome** as fellow Disciples

I, Pastor Ed, invite you and your family to come forward to publicly acknowledge...

1. Your belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord  
Matt 10:32, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."
2. Your commitment to follow Jesus as His Disciple  
2 Cor 8:5, "And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

**Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
Commitment to Discipleship**

- I believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord.
- I have been received as a child of God through Holy Baptism
- I believe God has called me to discover my gifts as His disciple ultimately to share the hope which is ours in Jesus Christ for heaven.

**Emmanuel's Mission:** Inspired by God's Holy Spirit, we share His love and invite people to Christ by proclaiming and living the Gospel.

**Emmanuel's Vision:** *to build followers of Jesus who LOVE GOD, LOVE PEOPLE, and SHOW IT.*

**LOVE GOD**

We guide people through a life of worship with passionate and engaging weekly gatherings, focused solidly on God's Word and Sacraments, contemporary in style and creative in technology.

**LOVE PEOPLE**

We create communities of Gospel gossipers through active small groups and random acts of kindness.

**SHOW IT**

We respond courageously to causes and concerns in Clovis and around the world that others neglect and we live by a mutual covenant that raises the bar on what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

**Yes, I am confident in the call of God's Holy Spirit as His Disciple.**

**1. I Will Protect the Unity of Christ's Mission into the World**

- ...By acting in love toward others
- ...By refusing to gossip
- ...By following those whom God has given as leaders and mentors

1 Peter 1:22, "Have a sincere love for your fellow believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart." (GN)

Eph 4:29, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (NIV)

Heb 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."(NIV)

**2. I Will Share the Responsibility of our God's Mission into the World**

- ...By praying for God's harvest growth
- ...By inviting the unchurched or uncommitted into greater discipleship
- ...By warmly welcoming others

II Th 3:1, "Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be

honored, just as it was with you. (NIV)

Romans 15:7, “So, warmly welcome each other into the church, just as Christ has warmly welcomed you; then God will be glorified.” (LB)

### **3. I Will Serve God by using Every Gift and Ability He’s Given**

...By discovering my gifts and talents  
...By being equipped to serve  
...By developing a servant’s heart

1 Peter 4:10, “Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you...” (PH)

Eph 4:11-12, “It was God who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...”(NIV)

Phil 2:4-7, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ...” (NIV)

### **4. I Will Support the Witness and Testimony of Christ into our World**

...By connecting with fellow Christians for worship and accountability  
...By coming alongside others in a small group setting asking for accountability at living a godly life for witness and outreach  
...By being generous financially in my personal, professional, and church life  
Hebrews 10:25, “Let us not give up the habit of meeting together ...but let us encourage one another...” (NIV)

Phil. 1:27, “But whatever happens, make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the gospel of Christ.” (Ph)

1 Cor. 16:2, “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...” (NIV)

Lev. 27:30, “A tenth of all you produce is the Lord’s and it is holy”

## **The Rite of Being a Disciple of Jesus Christ Through Emmanuel Lutheran Ministry**

If God is leading you to commit to discipleship through Emmanuel's ministry then please plan on a Sunday as the day for formal acknowledgment of this. Please plan on attending the 11 a.m. Worship Service. I pray that God will continue to bless you as you grow in faith and love.

Yes, Pastor Ed, please plan on including my family and me. I understand that someone will call to see if I have any final questions!

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Past Congregation:** \_\_\_\_\_

Note: For those who are previous members of another congregation, please write or call your former congregation to indicate your desire to transfer. My Administrative Assistant is available to assist you in this process, if you desire.

God's Greatest Blessings are ours ... In Christ Jesus!

Rev. Ed Krueger  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
Clovis, California