

Lesson 1: Stand Secure in Grace and Truth



Looking for God's Love Story

Hear God's Redemptive Love Story

Grow In the Word

Embrace the Blessings of the Church

Introduction

"We love because God first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

God's love for you, demonstrated in the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the great love story of Scripture. Your Savior redeemed you with his holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death. Now the Lord gives you his living, enduring Word to keep you close to him—and through those words he teaches you about himself and points to his work of salvation again and again.

God’s grace compels you to listen to everything he says with humble reverence. By the power of the Spirit you have *“accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you”* (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Scripture is your greatest treasure, and the wealth of it runs through your fingers. You search its gems and marvel at each brilliant truth that reflects his redemptive love story.

This training will help you know, live, and teach the love story.

HEAR GOD’S REDEMPITIVE LOVE STORY

Many people have heard stories from “Antiques Road Show” about someone who has no idea that an item from their closet is a priceless treasure. Other times, people think their antique gadget is a valuable thing-a-ma-bob—when actually it did something completely different and is worthless. Experts are a blessing as they open your eyes to what is true and give value to what is important.

Know the Importance of God’s Love Story

In the same way, God has called pastors to esteem and explain the precious gift of Scripture. To some, the wealth of God’s Word is like a priceless treasure whose value is forgotten or taken for granted. But faith is renewed and enriched as instructors point to the message and truths of Scripture. You will be delighted to hear God’s loving plan of salvation in Christ.

Prof. Paul Wendland warns that if you look in Scripture for something you want to hear, you will likely find it. He says, “it is easy to find what you are looking for but it is hardest to find what is there ... You have to know what you are looking for and listening to.” This training turns your focus from what you want to hear and points you to what God wants you to know.

The Bible isn’t a practical guide for life or a checklist to make sure your life is good enough. It isn’t a “how to” book so you can become a spiritually transcendent being or god. This isn’t a book about religion. You are not reading about God—you are meeting him. This is where he reveals himself to you.

Some people approach Scripture thinking they can decide for themselves what God is saying. People like to determine their own truth and create their own love stories. But when they ignore God’s message of grace in Christ they have no hope for eternal life. This is God’s love story. He wrote it. He is love.

Scripture isn’t given for us to figure out why something happened—or didn’t happen. When there are tragedies or catastrophes in life, people expect that Scripture will explain why such things happened. Time and time again, the world

asks, "What is God doing about all these problems?" Sinful man accuses God of being weak or uncaring. They ask, "Where is God?"

And what is God's response?

His response is seen on Calvary where his only Son is beaten and tormented for sin. Crucified and forsaken by God, Christ bears the punishment for the sins of every person. This is where you find God. This is his sacrifice to redeem you. It is the payment that brings eternal life with him—the eternal God made flesh to bear your sin.



Where Do You Find God?

You find God at the cross.

The great God who made the universe is found at the cross where his plan of salvation is made complete. Christ joins our weakness and pain—he carries every burden of humanity. The Savior bears the weight of the sins of the world. This is where you find God.

At that place, where he seems weak or unreal, is where he is most powerfully present. Look in the face of his suffering and ask, "Why?"



Luther's Explanation and Response to the Love Story

Reflect on Luther's explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed with renewed appreciation. Read the words as your personal response to God's Redeeming Love Story.

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.

This is most certainly true."

Treasure the Big Picture of Scripture

Knowing the incredible value of God’s salvation unveiled in Scripture, we tremble at the gift in our hands. We hold inspired words—they are Spirit breathed words that open the door to heaven. But God calls you to not be afraid. He invites you to open the pages and meet him again and again.

You begin learning Scripture by knowing it is the inerrant Word of God. There are no errors in the Bible. But you, like many, may be intimidated by Scripture—or perhaps a bit overwhelmed at the magnitude and holiness of God’s Word. Have you almost felt lost in his vast ocean of truth?

Yes, everyone has felt this way.

While you have confidence that what you read is true—it can also be scary because you don’t want to mess it up. Have you ever studied a passage and realized how much you didn’t know? Or wondered if you’re focused on the right thing? Is it possible that you’re not getting anything out of your reading? How can you really know what it means?

Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. ³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:30-31)

You are not alone.

The Holy Spirit will guide you as you search the Scriptures and seek his truth. Pastors and teachers delight in explaining the Word to others—your brothers and sisters in Christ also encourage you along the way. This training serves as a map that points to the path of Scripture, it helps you see the big picture and get your bearings. It helps you see where you are going.



What is the “Big Picture?”

“When you come to the Scriptures, what you are looking for is a seeking God who wants to reach people and bring them into his kingdom forever. We are tracing the arch of that story as it works its way through history. We’re looking for a love story where God comes to us and presents himself to us.” —Prof. Paul Wendland

There is an old saying, “you can’t see the forest for the trees.” Of course the idea is that if you are standing in the middle of the forest looking at tree bark and pine needles you lose sight of the forest. You miss the big picture.

If the Bible is a forest, its name is “God’s Loving Plan of Salvation in Christ.” This is the great revelation and treasure to be searched. Journey deep in the forest

and linger in its richness and tiny treasures—but never forget where you are. You are in the place where the Lord reveals himself as the God who “*so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).



Studying Pine Needles and Tree Bark

When you learn about pine needles or tree bark in the middle of the forest, you understand them clearly. It is easy to see how they benefit the forest, what makes them grow and the intricate way all the pieces fit together for a healthy forest.

When you study Scripture, remember you are meeting God and learning about his saving love for you in Christ. As you understand the context of God’s redeeming love story and see the pieces fit together you have a stronger, clearer picture of Scripture—and God.

Once the big picture is clear and the rich foliage of the forest is familiar, you will notice if things don’t belong or fit in. In the same way, when you learn Scripture and know it well, you will see what doesn’t fit in. Ideas, philosophies or the comments of others may contradict or undermine Scripture. False teaching will stick out because you are so familiar with the truth.

The world doesn’t even know what truth is—but your ability to discern truth will grow as your knowledge of Scripture increases. You examine Scripture like the Bereans and have a Christian world view.

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. (Acts 17:11)

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. (1 John 4:5-6)

You learn not to question God’s judgments because you know he is unfailing in his faithfulness. You flourish under his authority and orderliness. You won’t wonder if a sinful lifestyle would be better. You know God. You meet him in his Word daily.

The spiritual wisdom that comes from the Word will open your eyes and ears to see, hear and perceive life from God’s perspective. The Word of God is the

standard that distinguishes truth from lies. In conversations, the Spirit will give you compassionate insights to hurting hearts and spiritual needs of others.

*I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.*

*¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path. (Psalm 119:104-105)*

*Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me. (Psalm 119:133)*

*Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies. (Psalm 119:98)*

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.*

*The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7)*

*For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. (Proverbs 2:10)*

Observe [God's decrees and laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? (Deuteronomy 4:6-7)

The Word equips you with wisdom the world cannot even comprehend. The guidance it gives will seem foolish to the world. But it will draw you into a deep relationship with Christ where nothing else matters. Only Christ. One thing. The way, the truth and the life of Christ.

Respect the Teachings of Law and Gospel

Another essential truth as you study and teach Scripture is understanding the difference between law and gospel. Theologians and scholars recognize the continual struggle to make the best applications of law and gospel but for the purpose of this training, law and gospel will be briefly defined and explained.



Defining and Recognizing Law and Gospel

Law—all the commands which tell people what God wants them to do and not to do. When Scripture tells you what God demands or how you should live, that is a message of the law.

Gospel—the good news that God in love sent Jesus to take away the sins of all people. When Scripture tells you what God gives and how he blesses you, that is a message of the gospel because those things come to you through Christ.

The specific message commonly referred to as “the gospel” is the truth that Jesus lived and died to pay for the sins of everyone.

Though the topic of law and gospel can be deeply theological and complex, it is also practical and important for those who teach the Word. When discussing God’s Word you need to understand whether a person needs correction from the law or comfort from the gospel. Luther summarized the quandary with his instruction to “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.”

If someone is comfortable with sin and thinks they are living well enough, they need to hear God’s demand of perfect holiness proclaimed in the law.

If someone is burdened and struggling with guilt over sin they need the reassurance of full and free forgiveness in Christ.

But it isn’t always that easy.

It is very hard to understand when and how to share the law with someone. You will be challenged to put this into practice when you teach. It is your love for others, not frustration, that fuels and compels you to talk to someone about sin.

The gospel can become muddied with discussions that emphasize feelings or emotions, godly living or human thinking. The proclamation of the gospel is the truth that Christ has completed the work of salvation. Learn to speak it clearly.

When you aren’t sure what to say, talk about the sacrificial love of Christ and his completed work of salvation. If you can only say one thing, let it be the gospel.

Thoughts to help you apply law and gospel:

1. Love is telling people what they need to hear not what they want to hear.

2. The law pricks hearts with questions about guilt, failure, worth, purpose and identity. It exposes the problem of sin.
3. The gospel is God's answer—it announces his work of salvation completed by Christ. But you can't have the answer without the question.

It is hard to understand that sharing the law is loving. People search for love and imagine it will always make them feel good. They are deluded into believing that love is whatever they want to hear instead of the truth of God. But our hearts ache with emptiness and guilt gnaws at our conscience. Love asks, "What is the truth?" Love isn't afraid to say what God says about sin and guilt—that is the law.

The law is important because you need to realize you cannot measure up and you will never meet God's demands because he requires perfection. It is not love to tell people it is okay to continue in sin that will end in damnation.

Tell people it doesn't have to be this way. We all have stuff in our lives that is messed up. Listen to the rescue plan from God. We can't walk in denial. You wouldn't let an alcoholic continue on the path of alcoholism—you want to help! You don't want people to continue in sin. You want them to understand the consequences of the sin.

It might be easiest to first point them to how their sin impacts their relationships with others—but ultimately they need to see that sin separates them from God.

This is all about love. Love means you're committed to people even if they never get it. It wounds your soul to think that people you are in a relationship with will not be in heaven. But you don't have to preach to them or at them every week—just let God work through the relationship. Encourage them in the relationship, be patient, keep working with them—don't feel the relationship has to be centered in addressing sin. It is a process.

God comes and changes the plot. He rewrites the story—and that is the gospel. The gospel is God's redeeming love story.



Law and Gospel by C.F.W. Walther

When you're ready to start delving into the deep stuff, you can learn much from a compilation of C.F.W. Walther's evening lectures entitled, "Law and Gospel." Written to guide pastors in applying law and gospel to their preaching, this rich resource will bless you with great insights and keen applications.



Other Ways the Words “Law” and “Gospel” are Used

There are other ways that “law” and “gospel” are used in Scripture. The context of the passage helps you understand how the word is being used.

“**Law**” sometimes refers to all of God’s Word.

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. (Psalm 119:97)

“**Law**” sometimes refers specifically to the Ten Commandments. It may also refer to all the demands of God.

Through the law we become conscious of our sin. (Romans 3:20)

“**Law**” might refer to the first five books of the Old Testament (also called the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. (Nehemiah 8:1)

“**Gospel(s)**” may also refer to one or all four books of the New Testament written to record the life of Christ (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

As your faith and love for the Scriptures grow, you will soon have a compelling desire to share the Word of God with others. As you begin to look for those opportunities, questions of self-doubt will attack. You? Do you know enough? Do you have enough wisdom? Are you sure?

That is why you are in this training.

Equip Women to Teach the Word sets you firmly on the foundation of Christ and silences your doubts with the truth of Scripture. It shows you how God’s Word prepares you for a lifetime of faithfully sharing Scripture.



Activity: Hear God's Redemptive Love Story

It's your turn to Hear God's Redemptive Love Story.

Step One: Explain the truths and beauty of the phrase, "God is found at the cross."

Step Two: Think about the forest and the pine needles. Talk about the passage below correctly in the context of Scripture (like you would explain how the needle fits in the forest). Then talk about someone who sees the needle but doesn't know about the forest. What might they not understand?

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
(Romans 8:1)*

Step Three: When someone expresses their intention to sin because they know they will be forgiven, what messages of law and gospel should you share?

GROW IN THE WORD

Introduction

You have the privilege of learning God's Word.

The most important reason you study God's Word is to be strengthened in your faith. It is the powerful and effective Word of God. As you seek quiet time with the Lord, devotion books can be a wonderful blessing and serve an important purpose. However, as one who teaches the Word, it is essential that you study your Bible.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Romans 10:17)

The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. (John 6:63)

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (John 17:17)

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17)

For the word of God is alive 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)

It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread. (Job 23:12)

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. (Colossians 3:16)

If you aren't familiar with the Bible it will be difficult to teach Scripture correctly or explain God's Word. Even more, if you hope to pour out living water to others your own well needs to be full.

Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:14)

God fills your well of living water through the Word and sacraments (we will talk about the sacraments later in this lesson).

Neither can you teach others unless you are instructed in the Word. God has given you a pastor to guide you in learning Scripture. Consider attending your pastor's Bible Information Class to review the key teachings of Scripture. Ask him when you have questions about Scripture.

Have an intentional plan to read the whole Bible.



Possible Bible Reading Plans

Read your Bible cover to cover.

Work through the Gospels and Psalms, then study Old Testament history. Finish the rest of the New Testament and the rest of the Old Testament.

The EHV Digital Study Bible has a reading plan on the home page.

A "One Year Bible" provides readings for each day of the year that enable you to work through the entire Bible in one year.

These tools do not replace personal Bible study, but they may help you stay connected to God's Word on a daily basis:

<https://whataboutjesus.com/begin-read-bible/>

<https://forwardinchrist.net/bible-readings-2021/>

"YouVersion" and Bible Gateway are popular apps that send daily Bible passages and readings.

Set your Bible somewhere that will help you remember to read it. Keep your study materials nearby. If you can't find time to read every day, don't be overwhelmed or discouraged. Just try to read it the next day.

Very simply, you can ask four questions as you read:

1. What is God telling me here?
2. What does this lead me to confess?
3. How can I apply what I've learned?
4. What does this lead me to pray about?

Study Your Bible With Solid Resources

A strong devotional life is marked by regular time spent studying Scripture. If you are unable to spend time studying God's Word, at least find a section of Scripture to read (and memorize if you are able) and reflect on it throughout the day.



What is a Strong Devotional Life?

A strong devotional life means studying your Bible regularly.

This lesson encourages you to spend time reading God's Word as a part of your daily life. But this training also wants to help you understand the rich blessings, wisdom, and spiritual insights you gain by studying Scripture. Memorize passages to plant his Word in your heart.

A strong devotional life will stir you to receive the Lord's Supper regularly. You will treasure the opportunity to receive the sacrament where God will strengthen your faith.

Reflecting on your baptism daily is a wonderful reminder of the grace you have been given and the new life you have in Christ.

You will learn about the advantages of a study Bible very soon, but even without a study Bible there is much you can learn. It may seem intimidating, but the only thing you need to remember is—do it.

Here are more tips on how to study your Bible.

1. Open with prayer.
2. Read a section of Scripture and reflect on what is happening and being said.
3. Ask the question: what is God telling me?

4. Are there notes at the bottom of the page? (Remember they are not inspired).

5. Understand the context.

6. Look up the cross references in your Bible.

7. Look at a map. (Commonly found in the back).

8. Use a reliable commentary to help you understand what you read.

9. What do you know about the people? Are they important? Learn about them.

10. How would you respond if you were there and how can you apply this to your life?

11. Take notes—especially “a-ha” moments.

12. As you read Scripture make a list of what you might want to pray about.

13. Write down any questions for your pastor.

14. Memorize Scripture.

15. Who else needs to hear this?

A personal study Bible is essential as you grow in the Word—it is a worthy investment. The price range for study Bibles varies considerably but inexpensive options are available at places like Amazon, used bookstores, etc. Your pastor may also have recommendations or ideas to help you find a Bible.



Selecting a Personal Study Bible

A good study Bible will reap invaluable blessings. Consider either:

1. [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (ESV translation). There are several ESV study Bibles—be sure you look for the “Lutheran Study Bible” published by Concordia Publishing House.
2. The Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) digital study Bible is available at <http://wartburgproject.org/digital-ehv-study-bible>. (see the appendix for more information about this study Bible). Printed copies will soon be available.
3. The [Concordia Self-Study Bible](#) is no longer being printed but if you have it or can find a used copy, it is an excellent resource.

Here is a sample of a study Bible. This is the digital EHV study Bible—the pages are presented side by side on your screen (used with permission):

EHV Study Bible

EHV < Acts > < 17 > < Reference or Search > Today

In Athens

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was very distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he led a discussion in the synagogue with the Jews and those who feared God, as well as with those who happened to be in the marketplace every day.

¹⁸Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers^e also debated with him. Some said, "What is this seed picker^h trying to say?" Others said, "He seems to be someone who is proclaiming foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹They took him and brought him to the council of the Areopagus,ⁱ saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are talking about? ²⁰You seem to be bringing in some ideas that are strange to our ears, so we want to know what these things mean." ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there enjoyed doing nothing more than telling or listening to something new.)^j

²²Then Paul stood up in front of the council of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious^k in every way. ²³For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar on which had been inscribed, 'To an unknown god.' Now what you worship as unknown-this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made with hands.^l ²⁵Neither is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all people life and breath and everything they have. ²⁶From one man,^m he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live. ²⁷He did this so they would seek Godⁿ and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.^o ²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being.^p As some of your own poets have said, 'Indeed, we are also his offspring.'^q

Size -1 Resources

¹17:19 A large gathering of Athenian men such as this was customary almost daily because of their love of discussing matters of every kind (verse 21). It is uncertain whether this remained an informal discussion, or whether it became a more formal meeting of the council that bordered on an investigation.


^j17:21 Though the glorious days of the Athenian Empire were 400 years in the past, Athens was still something of a cultural center.

^k17:22 Paul chooses his words very carefully. The Greek word for *very religious* does not imply that the Athenians have a correct understanding of how to find God, but it commends them for the fact that they have an interest in spiritual things and are searching.

The Areopagus was a body that was commissioned by Athenian law to look into religious affairs. So it makes sense that Paul appears before them.

Their meeting place overlooked the Forum of Athens. (*Areopagus* means *Ares* or *Mars Hill*).

Forum of Athens viewed from the Areopagus



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A study Bible contains additional notes, maps and explanations about the text (often found at the bottom of the page). Many Bibles have introductory pages for each book of the Bible to help you learn about the context and background. It will identify the author, setting, purpose and outline of the book. This basic information helps you understand God's Word more thoroughly.



Terms Used in Study Bibles

A **reference** refers to the book, chapter, and verse where a passage is found (e.g., Genesis 1:1). Abbreviations for the books are commonly used.

A **cross-reference** will direct you to other passages that contain a similar message or key word. It also might point you to the original statement or actual event recorded in a different book of the Bible.

A **concordance** will list all the verses that include a particular word, for example, “weary.” Remember that words may be unique to a translation so if another translation says “tired” it will not appear. Google can help with that too—just follow the link to the Scripture reference!

A **Bible dictionary** can explain words that are unfamiliar to you.

A **chart of weights and measures** will give you the current equivalent for things like a “*drachma*” (which is money), an “*ephah*” (which is a measure of weight), or a “*cubit*” (which is a measure of length).

Maps are important as they give you an image to help you grasp the geography, terrains, or journeys recorded in Scripture. It might help you understand how long or difficult a journey would be.

A **harmony of the Gospels** will put all the events of the Gospels in chronological order. It is often helpful to know when an event happened.

These are just a few key tools common to many study Bibles. Learn to use your study Bible to unlock all the rich treasures!

You may also find it helpful to use a free online Bible study tool like biblegateway.com where you can read passages in many different translations. BibleHub.com will also show you all the passages that include a particular word. The commentaries on these sites are not always doctrinally correct and may include false teachings. Reading with discernment is important but these tools may help you find words or passages as you study.

Commentaries also help as they explain or analyze individual books of the Bible, chapter by chapter or verse by verse. They give you additional background and historical insights to enrich your understanding of the Word. They may also comment on specific words and their meanings from the original language.

There are many excellent books and commentaries to enrich your personal learning but it is important to read reliable commentaries. Commentaries are not inspired or without error—they will reflect the theological background or perspective of the author. Talk to your pastor about which commentaries or books would be best to read, he will likely have some good suggestions.

Consider building your own personal library of solid reference materials for your personal study. See the appendix for a list of resources to deepen your personal Bible study.

The most noteworthy commentary is the [People's Bible](#) series published by Northwestern Publishing House. Since you can purchase individual volumes corresponding to books of the Bible, it is very cost-efficient. The content, maps, outlines, and commentary are exceptional. Many church libraries have a set of People's Bibles.



Start a Personal Library With These Solid Resources

In addition to a personal study Bible, become familiar with these resources and consider adding them to your personal library.

[People's Bibles](#): commentary series that includes every book in Scripture (sample in the appendix).

[People's Bible Teachings](#): topical studies (sample in the appendix).

[Bible History Commentary](#) by Franzmann (three volumes):

Old Testament

New Testament 1 (covers Jesus' life through Gethsemane)

New Testament 2 (covers Jesus' arrest through Paul in Rome)

Kretzmann (a free online commentary: <http://kretzmannproject.org>).

The Holy Spirit will continue to increase your understanding of Scripture as you read your Bible, see the big picture, and study Scripture.

Learning the context of Scripture will be another important step in deepening your knowledge of the Word. Context is critical in understanding God's message correctly.

Context refers to the situation, historical setting, or placement of the text. When you read a passage or section of Scripture, look through the chapter to see what else is happening in those verses of Scripture. Check your study Bible or resources to learn the context. Who wrote the text? When, why, and to whom? What were the circumstances when it was written? Is there a reason the text appears in a particular place? What happens in the verses just before the text—or after it?



An Example of Context

You are likely familiar with God's command in Romans 13:1-5 about obeying government (when it doesn't conflict with God's Word).

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

If these words help you grasp God's supreme authority and his command to respect and obey the established government, you are right and have understood the message correctly.

But if you dig a little to understand the context, you will find that Paul writes these words when the Roman Emperor Nero was killing Christians.

That historical information does not change the meaning of the text, but it certainly sheds a new light on Paul's words.

This is a very simple example of context.

All this learning can be guided and supplemented by your pastor who studied for eight years to prepare for ministry. He has studied Biblical history, the original languages of Scripture, doctrine, preaching, teaching, and much, much more. Learn from his insights and talk to him about your thoughts and questions—he wants you to grow in faith and knowledge of the Word. He shares your love for Christ and his Word.

Gain Insights from the Old and New Testament

As you study your Bible be sure to also read the Old Testament and become familiar with its history. The rich, ancient and historical accounts have been preserved for your benefit—and the Old Testament offers wonderful insights about God and his people.

Most importantly you should study the Old Testament because:

1. Scripture is where you meet God and learn about him. The Old Testament gives magnificent glimpses of God's love, power and justice. You see him blessing, interacting and caring for his people. He reveals his thoughts, plans, and holiness with words of beauty and dignity.
2. The Old Testament is a historical record of God's saving work. It is the story of God's redeeming love told over and over again in the lives of different people for thousands of years. Each account in Scripture gives another vivid and living picture of God as he loves and helps his people.
3. You learn about God's many prophecies and promises that serve his holy purpose. You will see God never fails. Every prophecy and promise is filled according to his divine will. History unfolds with the affirmation that God is undeterred and unwavering in his plan to save humanity.
4. The Old Testament gives powerful evidence of God's patient love and forgiveness as humanity turns away from God in the Garden, at the Tower of Babel, before the Flood and throughout the lives of the patriarchs. You will not yet see the beautiful, fulfilled marriage of God to his people but you will see that God doesn't give up—his commitment is eternal.
5. Jesus quoted and treasured the Old Testament—the Jewish scrolls were his Bible. He read and referred to them often.
6. The New Testament church is filled with references and reverence for the Old Testament.

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Now these things happened to [the Israelites] as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the [Old and New Testament] Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)



Categories of Old Testament Books

The Old Testament books are categorized into three groups:

- **Historical** books (about Israel's history)
- **Poetical** books (songs and wisdom literature)
- **Prophetical** books (God's messages spoken through prophets)

If the Old Testament is unfamiliar to you, it might help to start with a Bible history book that includes the most notable stories. Learn about the patriarchs (the word means "chief, or father of a family") and study Israel's Old Testament kings. Become familiar with biblical patriarchs such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and King David. Know the basic timeline of Israel's history.

"Israel" is the name of the land where God's Old Testament people lived. It is also the name God gave to his people (they were called the Israelites). You can read about Jacob, the first person God named "Israel" in Genesis 32:28 and 35:10.

Recognize the significance of Israel's history—it will deeply enrich your understanding of the New Testament—especially the gospel.



500 Year Blocks

As you are first learning Bible history, it might help you to remember these approximate dates:

- **2000 BC** – Abraham
- **1500 BC** – Moses
- **1000 BC** – King David
- **500 BC** – begins the period between the Old Testament and New Testament.

You will find an excellent timeline (and other helpful information) at understandchristianity.com on the [timelines tab](#).

Continue to read and study all the books of the Old Testament until most of the people and events are clear. As you come to know the people of the Old Testament better, you will find companions who have walked and stumbled through the journey of faith. Learn their lessons as you learn to love God.

You will see yourself in the Old Testament believers—and perhaps you will understand someone else better. Marvel at how God uses ordinary people to accomplish his holy will—and then underline the many places he forgives them when they are utter failures. Thank God he does not leave us in our sin.

It will also be a blessing to understand Old Testament worship, laws and covenants. It is especially important to grasp the Old Testament sacrifices which foreshadowed the payment of Christ's blood to atone for the sins of the world.



Important Definitions:

Atonement—to make a payment to remove the guilt of sin so that God will no longer be angry.

Atonement—a payment offered to remove the guilt of sin so that God and sinful humans are reconciled. It may help you to remember “at-one-ment” because Jesus broke the barrier of sin and brought us peace with God.

Vicarious Atonement—the sacrifice of Jesus in our place, accepted by the Father as payment for our sins. (Vicarious means acting or done for another).

There were many ceremonies and sacrifices commanded by God to show his people that sin could only be paid for by a blood sacrifice.

Learn about the Old Testament temple to strengthen your understanding of New Testament passages which refer to God's temple. More than imagery or a concept, the New Testament repeatedly confirms that you are God's temple. The more you know about God's design and purpose for the temple—the better you will understand how you are now the temple of Christ.



Understand Old Testament Worship, Laws and God's Covenants

Learn about Old Testament worship and the sacrifices required as God's people were reminded that a blood payment was needed for sin. It foreshadows Christ's payment for sin.

Learn about the laws established in the Old Testament and understand the purpose of God's laws. There were civil, moral and ceremonial laws.

God's covenants in the Old Testament are especially important. A covenant is a solemn agreement, especially one in which God promises to bless and save. There are several significant covenants in the Old Testament that should be familiar to you.

The New Testament also brings incredible truths that point us to treasure our salvation in Christ and guide us to respond with lives of thanksgiving.

Gospels—the life of Christ is recorded in four Gospels (the word “gospel” means “good news”).

- The Gospel of Matthew is written by the apostle Matthew, a converted tax collector. Knowing he would have a Jewish audience, Matthew frequently refers to Jesus as the “Christ” or “Messiah” who was promised by God in the Old Testament.
- The Gospel of Mark is written by the evangelist also known as John Mark. This gospel shows Jesus as the Almighty Son of God in a fast paced account that would have appealed to the Romans (who despised the Jews). Mark’s gospel is closely associated with Peter’s memoirs of Christ.
- The Gospel of Luke is written by Luke, a physician and a traveling companion of the apostle Paul. Luke’s writing is filled with compassion and includes thoughtful details of many accounts with women.
- The Gospel of John is written by the apostle John, who often refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” It is the last gospel that was written and supplements much of what is not recorded in the other three gospels.

New Testament History—the book of Acts, also written by Luke, records the history, struggles, and growth of the New Testament church. It includes the three missionary journeys of Paul.

Epistles—the remaining books are epistles (the word “epistle” means “letter”). There are thirteen letters written by Paul, sometimes called the “Pauline Epistles.” Paul’s letters to Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Philemon are called the “Prison Letters” because they were written during Paul’s captivity in Rome. Paul’s “Pastoral Letters” include his letters written with pastoral advice (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).

Along with the remaining epistles of the New Testament, these letters (including Revelation) were distributed and read throughout the New Testament church and have been preserved by God as Holy Scripture.

Develop a Lifelong Pattern of Spiritual Growth

This journey of learning Scripture will last a lifetime and never cease to bring you closer to God. Your thoughts and actions—even the desires of your heart will be renewed to reflect the image of God.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

With an ongoing commitment to regularly study Scripture, Paul's words from Hebrews 5:12-14 couldn't be more relevant.

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! ¹³ Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.



What is "solid food?"

You aren't the first person to long for solid food with no idea of what it is.

- Solid food: God strengthens your faith through Scripture.
- Solid food: Cherish the sacraments.
- Solid food: Actively learn from your pastor.
- Solid food: Learn Scripture with other believers.
- Solid food: Pursue the insights of reputable resources.
- Solid food: Work through Scripture's teachings presented in the Catechism, creeds, and confessions.

Another blessing in the journey of spiritual growth is your relationship with your pastor. Purposefully invest yourself in this loving, shepherd-sheep relationship to gain spiritual wisdom and learn more about Scripture. You will be richly blessed as you treasure and appreciate your pastor's ministry and service. Pray for him as he bears the spiritual responsibility for your congregation.

You will find a variety of opportunities for Bible study through your church. These studies will be a wonderful place for you to learn from your pastor and receive training for your Christian service. God will continue to answer your prayers for spiritual growth as your faith is nurtured in Bible study.

As you learn alongside other believers, you will hear new and different insights, applications, and things to pray about. Discuss Scripture with your brothers and sisters in Christ—it will reveal perspectives and observations you may have never seen. God has put us together to learn from one another. We grow as one body and yet continually marvel at the unique insights and experiences that each person contributes for the benefit of others.

Delight in the relationships that grow at Bible study. Take time to listen to others and find personal connections to create friendships. Appreciate the ministry partnerships that are forged as you learn Scripture together. Recognize the importance of building those bonds especially within the church—this is your family in Christ.

Finally, your attendance at Bible study also sets a good example for others and gives them confidence that you are growing in your faith. It is helpful for them to see that believers continually learn more about Scripture. It is good to let others see how you value your pastor's teaching and show him respect.

Be an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)



Activity: Grow in the Word

It's your turn to Grow in the Word

Step One: Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15 and Psalm 34. How are they connected?

Step Two: How does this comment below from the EHV Study Bible help you understand more about the verses from 1 Samuel 21 and Psalm 34?

The circumstances that occasioned the writing of this psalm are described in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. In a moment of weakness of faith, David lost his confidence in the LORD's protection against Saul and fled to Israel's enemies, the Philistines. He sought refuge with Achish, king of the Philistine city of Gath. In this heading, Achish is called Abimelek, which seems to be a title of the Philistine kings. When David realized that he had foolishly put himself in danger by going to the Philistines for help, he faked insanity to escape from them. Through this experience David learned the truth of this psalm: "Blessed is the man who takes refuge in the LORD," not in his own schemes. Psalm 56 is from the same period of David's life and should be read with this psalm.

Step Three: When does your church offer Bible studies and which one(s) are best for you to attend?

EMBRACE THE BLESSINGS OF THE CHURCH

Introduction

This final section about the blessings of the church shows you God’s ongoing plan to hold and strengthen you. God connects you to all believers, which Scripture calls “the body of Christ” or “the kingdom of God.”

First, remember that God made you part of his kingdom. Scripture says you are “*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*” (1 Peter 2:9). As you learn more about God’s kingdom, you will delight in the beauty and magnitude of this holy nation.



The Kingdom of God or “Invisible Church”

The **kingdom of God** or “**invisible church**” includes all people everywhere who believe in Jesus as their Savior. They cannot be identified with absolute certainty because only God can see faith in the heart.

We start here because of the great privilege it is to be chosen as God’s holy people. Scripture repeatedly refers to this invisible church as a bride—and Christ is the Bridegroom (Isaiah 54:5, 62:5, John 3:29, Ephesians 5:33, Revelation 21:2,9). As a result, the church is referred to with feminine pronouns such as “she” or “her.” God places high honor on the church as she proclaims Christ and administers the sacraments.

You as an individual are also the bride of Christ, chosen by God with promises of grace, commitment, and holy love. It is a personal relationship in which God has sacrificed his own Son to make you his bride. He is delighted when you show his love to others—he is glorified (given attention and honor) when you share his Word of truth.

As you grow in your understanding of God’s saving work and intentional plan for his bride the church—and his plan for you—it will actually highlight the beauty, holiness, and importance of your own congregation.

“My little church on Hickory Street?”

Yes! Your congregation serves as a powerful blessing—it is the most intimate place where you are connected with your Savior through Word and sacrament. Your faith grows, and you are continually equipped to be involved in service and ministry—humbly reflecting God’s redemptive love for sinners.

Engage in Worship and the Means of Grace

You will receive great blessings through worship as you celebrate the presence of Christ. The Old and New Testament are filled with examples that emphasize the importance of worship in the lives of believers. Jesus said, *"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'"* (Luke 4:8).

The words of Paul resonate with our joyful call to worship, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God"* (Colossians 3:16).



What Are the Means of Grace and What Is Worship?

The **"means of grace"** refers to the gospel in Word and sacraments, by which God offers and gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

"Worship" includes any thoughts, words, or actions which we direct toward God as a way of praising him. For the purpose of this lesson, we will refer specifically to the worship services at your local congregation.

In worship you will hear the message of the law, where God condemns sin and reveals humanity's need for a Savior. You will also hear the gospel proclamation that Jesus has paid for your sins with his perfect life and innocent death. The messages of both law and gospel are essential elements of faithful Christian worship. They are distinctly different as one proclaims what God demands and the other announces what God has given.



Why Worship? Because God Invites and Commands You To Attend

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. (Psalm 22:22) This passage is also quoted in Hebrews 2:12.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (Exodus 20:8)

To encourage believers in the high value of worship, your church has developed many resources such as the hymnal "Christian Worship." The truth and beauty captured in the texts of Lutheran hymnody are rich, but you will also find prayers, psalms, and Scripture readings commonly used in worship. Look through the front section of your hymnal where you will find rich resources to guide your worship and express your faith.

Engage more deeply in your congregation's worship services as you discover what happens in worship and why it is important. As you know more about the purposeful, ordered parts of worship, you will have a greater appreciation for Lutheran worship. Grasp the beautiful and intentional parts of worship—your faith will be enriched with understanding and insights.



What Is Liturgy?

Many Lutheran churches use a liturgy in their worship services. The word liturgy comes from two Greek words meaning “people” and “work.” This style of worship, known as liturgical worship, is built on the historic Christian order of worship. “For as long as believers have gathered together, they have naturally included certain elements in their worship of God.”³

Despite being centuries removed from the early Christian Church, the basic form and primary focus of worship—that is, the liturgical style—has remained constant. God grants his people freedom in worshipping him, and therefore not all Lutheran churches elect to use a liturgy. Liturgical worship allows for great variety within a set pattern. It is not tied to a specific musical style, nor does it prefer one musical instrument over another. However, the liturgy used in the majority of Lutheran churches generally follows an orderly progression of thought focusing the worshiper on the means of grace.

The Lutheran liturgy contains a set pattern of basic elements such as canticles, Scripture readings, prayers, and hymns. Liturgy can also refer to different orders of worship. Common examples are Matins (Morning Praise), Divine Service (Common Service, Service of Word and Sacrament, Service of the Word), Vespers (Evening Prayer), Compline (Prayer at the Close of Day) and others. It does not always contain the same liturgical elements.

Ultimately, the liturgy serves as a cradle for the means of grace. Through the liturgy, the gospel is proclaimed, sins are forgiven, and the Sacraments are distributed. Through the liturgy, Jesus Christ is worshiped and proclaimed.

Dr. Kristi Meyer, [Understanding Lutheran Worship](#)

³ Baumler, Gary, and Kermit Moldenhauer, editors. Christian Worship: Manual. Northwestern Publishing House, 2002.

Esteemed in the liturgy, we pay special attention to the honor given to the Lord’s Supper which God has entrusted to the church. This is called a “mark” of the church because love and respect for the sacraments will identify a church who worships according to God’s commands. You belong to a “sacramental” church, which means that your church honors what the Bible teaches about the sacraments. God’s two holy sacraments are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

There are many important reasons to stay actively engaged in congregational worship and the sacraments.

1. Stay connected to the Word and grow in your understanding.
2. Remain humble and dependent on Christ.
3. Receive God's strength in the Sacrament.
4. Stay connected to the pastor, leaders, and family of Christ.
5. Be a godly example of a believer who loves God's Word, his bride, and fellow believers.
6. Establishing confidence in others that you are being taught the truth.



What is a Sacrament?

A **sacrament** is a sacred act that Christ established for his church, in which an earthly element is used together with God's Word, as a means of offering, giving, and sealing to us the forgiveness of sins and thus also life and salvation.

Baptism is the sacrament in which water is used in the name of the Triune God to bring people into the family of God.

The Lord's Supper, also called **Holy Communion**, is the sacrament in which the body and blood of Jesus are given together with bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins.



Important Resources to Deepen Your Understanding

Luther's Catechism includes an in-depth study of the sacraments with Scripture references so you can see what the Bible teaches.

The People's Bible Teaching Series includes topics central to Christianity and explains what Scripture teaches about Angels, Baptism, Christ, Creation, the Holy Spirit, Trinity, Sanctification, and more. See the appendix for a sample of this resource.

The means of grace is the gospel in Word and sacraments. The Word and sacraments are God's gifts to create and strengthen faith. The sacraments are not spiritual rites you follow to obey God, the sacraments are given for you to receive his blessings. God comes in the sacraments to give souls his grace and forgiveness. We are intimately connected to him through baptism and the Lord's Supper. The sacraments are holy, sacred, priceless treasures to the church.

There are several important truths you should remember about the means of grace:

1. God comes to us in baptism and the Lord's Supper to create and strengthen faith.
2. We receive spiritual strength—this is not our act of obedience.
3. He reminds us of his love and forgiveness with tangible elements that we can touch.
4. The sacraments have been entrusted to the church. She administers the sacraments.

Listen Attentively to the Sermon

Many believers struggle with the temptation to show up for church on Sunday, mindlessly respond in liturgy, and return home with no further thought about the message of God's Word. In fighting this temptation, it will be helpful to prepare for worship in various ways.

Ask your pastor about the readings for worship so you can reflect on those Scripture verses prior to worship. Take time to read the Scripture passages and talk about them with your family. Build anticipation for what will be read, then listen for particular topics or words. If the theme of the service has been shared earlier in an e-mail or newsletter, make a note to meditate on it throughout the week.



The Scripture Readings for Worship

The “**lectionary**” is an historical set of Scripture readings. Reviewing the readings in advance will help you know what to expect in worship. It will give you time to reflect on the Scripture passages that will be read or taught. For centuries, the church has utilized an annual calendar called “the church year” (p. 157 in *Christian Worship 1993*), which establishes a plan for the festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, and worship for other Sundays. Each Sunday has an assigned reading and Psalm which you will find in the front of the hymnal printed as the “**Lectionary**” (p. 163 in *Christian Worship 1993*). You will find the commonly used readings and reflection questions at wels.net/worship-helps.

Other times, worship may center around a specific theme (like a series on the Apostles’ Creed) or the pastor may select the readings.

As you take in the sights and sounds of Lutheran worship, you will notice how everything points to Christ. Christ-centered worship means that every part of worship draws you to the gospel message. The readings, hymns, and sermon will all work together to proclaim God’s plan of salvation in Christ. Truths about Christ radiate from the Word and offer countless themes for worship.

Each Sunday, the law and gospel will be woven into the liturgy and hymns—it will be proclaimed from the pulpit by God’s called servant. The message will resonate as you follow along with the responsive parts of worship and readings for the day. You will be filled with the joy of our Savior as you participate in the music and prayers. You are invited to offer your praise and thanksgiving. You will taste it at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.



A Receptive Heart Will Help You Listen

There may be times you are tempted to gloss over Bible verses or teachings that are difficult. There may be a portion of Scripture that makes you uncomfortable. You might want to ignore those messages and give them little thought. But God calls you to resist that temptation. He calls you to set your mind on his truth.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2)

Open your ears, and hear the words of wise people, and set your mind on the knowledge I give you. (Proverbs 22:17)

To keep your ears open to the truth of God you must also respect your pastor, for he is the one giving you God's message. Eagerly listen for his words of truth—he has been appointed by God to preach the Word to you.

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. (Hebrews 13:17)

God knows people are tempted to hear only what they want to hear. He knows some people will not listen at all. Scripture warns you against the danger of having ears that are "itching" or unwilling to hear.

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

Hear the seriousness of the law and recognize that you are a sinner. Listen with eager anticipation for the message of the gospel that brings forgiveness and hope. Meditate on the sermon's insights and examples. Think about how to apply what you've heard and remember it. Ask God to lead your thinking and show you his truth. In worship, God is welling up his Spirit within you.

You can also listen intentionally to share insights with others. Make notes or underline Scripture passages that might be an encouragement to someone you know. Consider how you might share thoughts from the sermon, prayers or hymns with others. It will be natural for you to share the thoughts, music, or passages that were especially meaningful to you.

Grow in Your Understanding of the Creeds and Confessions

Though there is much more to learn, we also give special attention to the confession of faith spoken in the words of a creed. This means your church is a "creedal" church—it confesses the teachings of several creeds.

A creed is a statement of what a person or group of people believes and teaches.



Did Jesus Think Creeds Were Important?

Jesus knew that some people would walk with him and others would turn away in unbelief. Jesus talked with his disciples about what they believed in Matthew 16:13-16. He asked, "*Who do people say the Son of Man is? But what about you? Who do you say I am?*"

Peter's answer, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*" is a confession of faith. That is what believers do. Christians confess what they believe on the basis of what Jesus has taught them.

It is also clear from the text in Matthew that the answer separated the disciples from the crowd and Jewish leaders. It identified them as those who trusted Jesus and believed his Word.

The Apostles' Creed is commonly recited to profess the central truths of the Christian church. It reflects the teachings of Christ's first apostles. The Nicene Creed, a creed written in Nicaea, is also commonly spoken. The Athanasian Creed defends the Scriptural truths about the Triune God.



The Ecumenical Creeds

The ecumenical or universal creeds include the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. All three are accepted in mainstream Christian churches.

The word "ecumenical" means "relating to, or representing the whole of a body of churches." (Merriam-Webster)

Your church professes agreement with these Christian creeds as well as the teachings of Scripture explained by the Lutheran Church and written in the Lutheran Confessions.

The creeds and confessions clarify many of Scripture's important doctrines (or teachings) and refute false teachings that threaten the church. The creeds and confessions preserve, proclaim, and protect the unchanging truths of God's Word. They were written in response to false teaching and identify what believers confess according to the truths of Scripture.

In studying the creeds and confessions, it will be helpful to understand the problems of the time period and what prompted the writings. If you research the false doctrine being taught, you will understand why the specific creed or confession was written. This is a great discussion to have with your pastor!

Having a summary of these key teachings of Scripture serves you well in learning more about the teachings of the church. The creeds and confessions give you deep thoughts for meditation and clear words for expressing your Christian faith. You will find the creeds reliable and consistent with Scripture.

As you learn about the history and teachings in the creeds it will heighten your respect and appreciation for your church. Rather than confining us, these creeds and the Lutheran Confessions assure us that we are on God's path of truth, "*and the truth will set you free*" (*John 8:32*). This is the truth for which Luther contended and by which he was able to stand.

Many of the church's early writers capture the truth of Scripture with fiery and contagious passion for the Word and sacraments. Their writings will fill you with humility, equip you with knowledge, and motivate you for service. The teaching of the Lutheran church and the confessions are important—and they never get old.



The Creeds and Confessions

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- The Athanasian Creed (emphasizes the Trinity)
- Luther's Small Catechism and Large Catechism
- The Augsburg Confession (presented at a church meeting in Augsburg, Germany) and its defense, The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (an "apology" is a statement of defense—it defended the teaching).
- The Smalcald Articles
- Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
- Formula of Concord (a Lutheran Confession which includes these writings along with the Epitome and Solid Declaration).

You can read a brief description about these writings and learn more about the Lutheran Confessions at <https://whataboutjesus.com/what-are-the-lutheran-confessions/>.

The Book of Concord is a collection of these creeds and Lutheran confessions. You can download a free copy at <http://www.bookofconcord.org> to read and study.

Start by reading [Luther's Small Catechism](#) and [Luther's Large Catechism](#). They will be an excellent introduction to other confessional writings. Knowing you will face all kinds of false teachings and questions about what Scripture teaches, these writings will be an important part of being equipped as a teacher of the Word.

Northwestern Publishing House has released a [newer version of Luther's Small Catechism](#) which is available in several translations ([NIV](#), [ESV](#) and [EHV](#)).



Activity: Embrace the Blessings of Your Church

It’s your turn to Embrace the Blessings of Your Church.

Step One: Identify two or three things that cause you distraction or frustration prior to worship. Always late? Can’t find your son’s shoes? Hungry? Create and implement solutions to those problems to minimize distractions and frustrations.

- Key problems

- Solutions

Step Two: Identify a trigger (like the church bells ringing, putting your hymnal on your lap, or folding your hands on the service folder) to remind you that it is time to turn all your attention to worship and the sermon. If you haven’t prayed yet, ask God to clear your mind and open your heart to hear him. Make a repeated effort to think about everything that happens in worship and why it is important. As you intentionally engage your mind and heart in worship, it will keep you from being distracted.

Step Three: Discuss how these questions would help you prepare to receive the Lord’s Supper (from Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal, 1993, p. 156).

1. What does God tell me about myself in his holy Word?
 2. What should I do if I am not aware of my sins or am not troubled by them?
 3. When I realize that I have sinned against God and deserve his punishment, what should I do?
 4. How do I receive his gracious forgiveness?
 5. What further assurance do I have that Jesus is mine and I am his?
 6. How can I be sure that I receive all these blessings in the Lord’s Supper?
 7. How will I respond to this priceless gift from Jesus?
-

Your Turn to Stand Secure in Grace and Truth

It's your turn to Stand Secure in Grace and Truth.

Review and Exercises

Review the following exercises from this lesson. If you are uncertain how to proceed, reread the appropriate section.

Hear God's Redemptive Love Story

- Explain the truths and beauty of the phrase, "God is found at the cross."

Grow in the Word

- Read Acts 16:11-40 and Philippians 1:3-5. List one person or event that may have been mentioned in Paul's prayers of thankfulness.

Embrace the Blessings of the Church

- Identify two or three things that cause you distraction or frustration prior to worship. Always late? Can't find your son's shoes? Hungry? Create and implement solutions to those problems to minimize distractions and frustrations.