

# ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Fall, 1997

Volume 31, No. 2

## Searching the Scriptures: A High Priority!?



THOUGH FEW OF US will ever get into outer space, the profound truth is that when the infant Jesus was born in Bethlehem on that Christmas night two thousand years ago, He clothed Himself in flesh because, in the presence; He and we live out does that imply eternity? In John tells us that purpose in you may, is th? believing name

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## Searching the Scriptures: A High Priority!?

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## Reflections

Have you ever experienced any of the following events? Someone complains that the Bible does not have answers to the important questions in his life. "The Bible simply does not answer the questions which are most important in my life today" is the lament. Or, you look forward to attending a Bible class, only to find that Holy Scripture is never used and scarcely mentioned. Or, while serving a congregation as a Sunday morning guest pastor, it appears that Bible study is not a high priority.

While few would deny that the spiritual health of the church relates directly to the church's level of involvement with the Bible, and that Bibles are readily available (the average home in the United States has three copies of the Bible), only a minority of Americans use the Bible. At the same time, adults report a high level of interest in the Bible, with many believing that Holy Scripture is the most important book in their lives. In one study, 77 percent of a sample of American Protestants expressed a clear interest in studying God's Word.

This edition of *Issues in Christian Education* focuses on promoting the use of the Bible in Lutheran congregations. Attention is given to motivation needed for engagement with the Bible, to a Lutheran perspective on searching the Scriptures, and to the development of a mindset that will lead to a higher level of involvement with God's Word.

As the writers of the articles and editorials of this edition point out, motivation shaped by the Gospel will lead to the development of a mindset for searching the Scriptures that will produce changes in the lives of individuals and congregations. That surely deserves a high priority!

Orville C. Walz, President

# Editorials

## A Thought Experiment

BY AND LARGE, people are both fascinated by and afraid of the Bible. They know a little about it either through childhood Bible stories or by reputation, and they suspect there is something of great importance inside. While they vaguely admit they should study it (whatever that may mean), they are reluctant to start for fear of looking ignorant about their Creator's own word and message to them. Their hesitation is sustained by some guilt for not already being better informed. And they also suspect they will find expectations and troubling issues in Scripture that will complicate their lives (in other words, Law). Best to just leave the Bible to pastors and those who already understand it and listen hard at the next Christmas or Easter service.

This *Issues* explores the theme of searching the Scriptures, a pursuit validated by John 5:39 that needs no further justification here. Instead, as an editorial introduction or conclusion to your reading, consider a thought experiment. Imagine teaching Scripture in a congregation six or seven days a week, all day long. What might happen to that congregation? What would be the effect on individuals, the spiritual life of the parish, stewardship, families, social ministry, worship, evangelism, the community and missions? What would happen if lots of people in that church, young and old, found out what was really in the Bible, taught by someone(s) biblically literate with a knack for teaching? (By the way, this proposal for teaching Scripture daily, all day, and on Sunday is realistic. Lutheran high school religion teachers have done it for years.)

How might this work? A congregation bold or desperate enough would commit itself to supporting a pastor, director of Christian education, or teacher for a year in a non-tenured call as teacher for the experiment. Perhaps a teacher would be best to avoid the temptation of shunting the pastor into other pastoral duties. This teacher would be at a station in life to permit the necessary flexible scheduling and at a level of expertise in both knowledge and skill to enable vibrant instruction, discussion and interaction with a range of younger and older adult learners. The teacher would then begin assembling as many small and large group Bible classes and studies as possible.

Remember, this is a good teacher who quickly establishes a positive reputation for knowing and navigating Scripture thoroughly, not intimidating students, being able to listen beyond the surface of questions for what people really wonder about but may be cautious to voice, teaching to both personal and participant interests, bringing the Word to bear on individual, family, social and congregational issues, capably dividing Law and Gospel, and applying God's promises to people's hurts and fears. By conveying an excitement for the Whole Counsel of God and a love for students this teacher, day by day, gets more and more members interested in specific texts, books and the whole Bible—of which they had been afraid.

These members begin to open pew Bibles during the sermon to check a text they are reminded of, making connections they had not seen. Board and committee members start to evaluate programs in terms of Biblical mandates and consolation rather than what is merely pragmatic. Families have Bible stories to share and exchange, and not just heard from Sunday school children. Some ask about congregational support for short term missions, and others begin to offer that support. More young people see a future with and through the church; some consider the possibility of church careers. Bible study participants start to hear personally from each other about all the good things happening in their church and express appreciation through their tithes and offerings. Members come to realize what Richard Foster means when he says,

There is probably no more transforming instrumental means of grace than reading, studying, and meditating upon Scripture. Habitual reading of the Bible touches the affections; systematic study of the Bible touches the mind; and sustained meditation upon the Bible touches the soul.

("Becoming Like Christ," *Christianity Today*, February 5, 1996)

What percentage of involvement would it take to make a difference? Scripture itself offers a few answers: 3,000 on the day of Pentecost; 120 after the ascension; 12 apostles in an upper room; a few at an empty tomb; one woman at a well. Actually, Scripture's answer has to do not with percentages but with curriculum—searching the

Scriptures. They bear witness to Him in whom we have life. Any congregation that intensifies that search will find its congregational life intensified by a power which is able to do far more abundantly all that we might ask or think. Surely this is why His gifts were that some should be pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Of course, Paul's idea here is no mere thought experiment.

Dr. Russ Moulds

Assistant Professor of Psychology  
Concordia College—Seward

## On Not Being Professional

NO ONE WOULD ACCUSE National Public Radio of fomenting religious revival. But six months or so ago a call-in program on NPR hosted the translator of a new edition of Thucydides' *Peloponnesian Wars*. The program's moderator asked a caller to comment on the importance of this ancient work. "Why, it's as significant as . . . as . . . as the Bible!" the caller sputtered.

Any honest sociologist or historian—Christian or not—must acknowledge the seminal role the Scriptures have played in western civilization. They tower in importance far above any other work. They have shaped our laws, our theories of justice, our concept of the family, our art, our view of what it means to be human.

But for the Christian, most of this matters little or not at all. In fact, our Lord excoriated the religious leaders of His day for looking at the Scriptures in this way. Jesus' enemies scrutinized the intellectual and moral details of God's Book, but in stubborn pride refused to see that all Scripture points to Him—Messiah and Savior (John 5:37-40, 44-47). The Sadducees who opposed Christ dug in their heels and refused to come to Him to receive the gift He freely offered—eternal life.

How easily we today can fall into the same trap that snapped shut on the hearts of the ancient Sadducees. We who teach the Word of God stand at the brink of that maw more often than we know. We open our Bibles, professionally, many times a day to plan a lesson, to teach that lesson, to counsel a student, to comfort a mourner. We may carry a personal Bible that's underlined and annotated. The pages may be falling out from overuse. Still the question applies to us. "What

has God said to you today in His Word?" or "What text are you teaching?" Not "How does this passage fit into the chapter's context?" Not even, "What does God's Word say to our society?" But "What is God saying to me? Today?"

If we cannot answer that question honestly, the Bread of Life we propose to give those we teach has almost certainly gone stale. And worse, our own souls are growing hungry, cold, dark. I know. I've been there. Maybe you have, too.

You see, Jesus never invited anyone to come to Him, to learn of Him "professionally." Instead, He invites us to sit at His feet, to hang on His every Word. His Word is our life! He urges us to put on the humility that receives His new life each new day. He calls us to submit to the life-long transformation His Word works in our hearts as it reveals our sin and our need for Him—our terrible need for Him—as our Savior.

But it's precisely that need that gets in our way, isn't it? It hurts to see it, to realize it, to face it. Our sin makes it easier to read Thucydides than Thessalonians. The Holy Spirit often confronts before He comforts. His white-hot Word of Law melts away our excuses and exposes the rags of our insufficient service, our frequent and gross disobedience to the Holy One of Israel.

In fact, that's what we need God's Word to do for us. We may not always admit it. We may not often want it. But we always do need it. When we awaken to our brokenness, to our poverty, to our helplessness, our Savior bursts into our despair with His Word of grace. And we need *that* Word infinitely more than we need four theories about justice, or six steps to a happy family life, or twelve principles for an ethical lifestyle. God always speaks His Word of Law for the sake of the Gospel. He wounds so He can bandage; He tears so He can heal (Hosea 6:1). That's why we read the Scriptures. And that's how we read the Scriptures—attentive to His Law, clinging to His Gospel.

The Bible does for us—and for our students—what Thucydides never, ever will. It comforts after it confronts. It conveys to us God's very own forgiveness. It confers God's transforming power to become more like Christ. As we are transformed, we cannot help but share the love we have received. Saved, we serve. We teach. We disciple others. All by the power of God's Word of grace.

Jane L. Fryar

Editor, Bible Study Resources  
Concordia Publishing House  
St. Louis, Missouri

## The 95 Theses, Continued

I remember when I first heard the speakers and read the books of the authorities on the Holy Scripture. What a great experience to benefit from their years of study and their ability to communicate the Word of God! I am still grateful for the experiences.

Later, when I was not only a student of the Bible but also a teacher of it, I found that I needed the authorities of Scripture even more. As I struggled to learn more, I depended more and more on the ones who wrote the books and gave the lectures. But then I hit a wall.

My authorities did not always agree. It was easy as long as I read or heard only one great scholar. I remember coming home from a pastors' conference inspired by the speaker. Then I read an article by another authority who attacked the theology of the speaker who had inspired me. I was in a dilemma. If I studied only the authorities I already knew, I would learn no more. If I expanded my range to other authorities, I lost all sense of theological security.

Then I discovered a worse problem. I had become an authority! To those who heard me speak and read my books, I had become one who had the answers. Okay, so the books were only children's sermons, but being an authority through them became an even greater problem. They were being used on the front lines of teaching by those who did not have the opportunity or need to check other authorities.

An even greater concern for me: Members of my congregation accepted my answers as the correct interpretation of Scripture. In my parish the Book stopped with me. I knew that was not good. First of all, I could not be the authority because I needed one. Secondly, as soon as I stepped outside the small pond of my own congregation, I was one voice among many—most of whom knew all the answers, and some of whom had different answers than I did.

Without nailing anything to the church door (glass and metal church doors have ruined that tradition), I started my reformation of me. Over the years I developed some theses that help me both study and teach the Bible. It's the Lutheran thing to do, and since I am a Missouri Synod Lutheran, I'll start with No. 96.

96. The authority of the Bible is in the Scripture itself, not in its teacher. I still hear and read those who have much more knowledge than I. But now I am glad that none of them is the final authority. I benefit from each of them to the extent that they lead me back to the real authority.

97. I don't know the answer to every question that we ask of the Bible—and neither does anyone else. The Bible is not an answer book. The process of looking for the answers to our questions is much more important than a chapter and verse that proves we are right. I seek answers in the Bible. However, when I look for them, I most often find more (and more important) questions.

98. God knew what He was doing when He gave us the wild visions of Daniel and John. The teacher's job is not to figure out some code and give a logical explanation. He has given us clear and logical doctrines in other parts of the Bible. The visions are worship and emotional events that we are to experience, not understand.

Likewise, Jesus told parables so that we have to think and figure things out ourselves. He could have given one-verse answers to those who asked questions. Instead, he often told stories so people would continue to find the answer in their lives. My job is to teach the parable—not my explanation.

99. I believe that God inspired what He did write and also inspired what He did not write. I am not here to fill in the blanks in Scripture—and there are a lot of them. We learn when God speaks, and we learn from His silence.

100. I read the Bible to psych out God. I read it to hear what people said, and then listen to what God said. I read it to see what people did, and then see what God did. It's easy to put myself and others in those same situations.

101. I delight in finding parts of Scripture that I don't understand, especially when it is in the context of something I think I do understand. That's when I learn more.

The list is not complete, because I'm not yet either.

Rev. Eldon Weisheit, *emeritus*  
Tucson, Arizona

# Editorials

## The 92 Tables Continued

The 92 tables are a collection of 92 small, square, white tiles, each with a different design or pattern. They are arranged in a grid, and the designs range from simple geometric shapes to more complex, abstract patterns. The tiles are set against a dark, textured background, which makes the white tiles stand out prominently. The overall effect is one of a rich, intricate mosaic.

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## Motivation for Searching the Scriptures

HARRY WENDT



ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO, while conducting a seminar near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, I spent some time with Dr. Eric Gritsch. When Gritsch was 13, he served as an officer in the German army and had under his command 200 soldiers, all of whom were about 12 years old. On one occasion, while Gritsch and his group were in the trenches in northern Germany, thousands of Russian soldiers suddenly appeared on the horizon. Though Hitler had given orders that every German soldier should die for the Fuhrer rather than retreat, Gritsch shouted, "Run for your lives!" Five got away; the rest were slaughtered. Gritsch was one of the five. Convinced that God had spared him for a reason, he eventually became a Lutheran pastor, and then a professor of church history at Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary. During our time together, Dr. Gritsch said (in his colorful German accent!): "What we need in the Church are rabbis—people who will sit and study the biblical text year after year, and ask 'What does it mean? Just what does it mean?'" I could not agree more! Dr. Gritsch's comments will color what follows.

Why are God's people to spend their lives as "biblical rabbis"? One could suggest a hundred reasons for doing so, but the best way to answer the question would be to put people on a space shuttle, take them out to the vicinity of the moon, point them back to Planet Earth, and ask, "Where did that come from? Why are you on it? Where will you be when you no longer walk on it?"

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DR. HARRY WENDT, THE FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF CROSSWAYS INTERNATIONAL, MINNEAPOLIS, CONDUCTS BIBLE SEMINARS IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN COUNTRIES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

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## The Profound Truth

THOUGH FEW OF US will ever get into outer space, the profound truth is that when the infant Jesus was born in Bethlehem on that first Christmas night two thousand years ago, the One who created and fills all space clothed Himself in flesh to pay Planet Earth a visit. The visit continues because, in the ascension, Jesus did not *withdraw* His presence; He *transformed* it. Jesus is still here, and we live out life before His eyes. And just what does that imply for each of us, for time and eternity?

In John 20:30,31, the evangelist John tells us that he chose his materials with a purpose in mind, namely: ". . . that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (NRSV translation, 20:30,31; see also the NRSV translation of Matthew 1:1). Here John reminds us that the point at issue in the New Testament is not *the beginning of the forgiveness of sins*. God has forgiven sins ever since sin began. The point at issue in the New Testament is its insistence that *Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah*, and the questions this raises are: *What kind of a Messiah was Jesus? What was the nature of the Messianic Age that broke in with Jesus the Messiah? What did Jesus' ministry mean for Judaism? What did it mean for the new community that Jesus formed, and what does it mean for us today?* To answer these questions, people must grapple with the Old Testament story-line and then ask: 1) How did Jesus handle that story-line? 2) How did He reinterpret its themes? 3) What does His "redefining" imply for faith and life today?

It is difficult for people today to understand the gut-wrenching agony and awe that the first disciples must have experienced during the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Prior to the cross, they apparently thought that Jesus had come to throw out the Romans and restore the good old days of David. Though initially that dream died when Jesus died, it surfaced again after the resurrection (Acts 1:6). But when the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?", Jesus rejected their question and finally withdrew His visible presence. Without doubt, during the ten days that followed, the disciples held the most intense "small group" study ever held!

## Three Key Truths

DURING THE COURSE of that "small group" study, the Spirit made three key truths clear to them. First, Jesus' crucifixion had been a coronation event. Though they had expected Jesus to "slay their foes and raise them high," He had chosen to walk the way of a servant-without-limit, and though at Calvary He had appeared to be at His weakest, He, the supreme Servant, had actually been at His best and strongest. Pilate's superscription, "The King of the Jews," designed to be a bad joke, had expressed the truth! Second, though no person on earth expected the resurrection, the Father in heaven did, and in raising Jesus not only declared His power over death and the grave, but *vindicated* His Son's saving, servant ministry. Third, Jesus' ascension, above all else, had been His enthronement over the universe.

The third point calls for clarification. It might be asked: "After the resurrection, as Jesus appeared and disappeared, where did He come from when He appeared, and where did He go when He disappeared?" The answer to both questions is: "Nowhere!" He remained with the disciples throughout. What Jesus was doing beyond the resurrection was, in the words of F. F. Bruce, paying little visible visits to assure His disciples that He was still with them. And in ascending, He was saying, "No more little

visible visits, but I am not leaving you! I am not *withdrawing* My presence, but *transforming* it." The cloud into which Jesus disappeared at the ascension was a symbol of the divine presence, as it had been throughout the wilderness wanderings, at the dedication of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8:10), and at the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8). Further, because the Father in heaven does not have a right hand, when the Scriptures (Ephesians 1:20) and the Apostles' Creed speak of Jesus being at the Father's "right hand," the reference is not to locality, but to authority. Jesus is enthroned as Lord of the universe! It follows, then, that the only way order can prevail within creation and history, and among humanity, is when all submit to the Lordship of Jesus, the Servant Messiah. That's enormously big stuff!

Little wonder, then, that the disciples and New Testament writers saw in Jesus' Person the Creator clothed in flesh; in Jesus' ministry, a new beginning in creation and history; in Jesus' teaching a new *Torah*, Law, revelation, truth and wisdom; in Jesus' servant life, the final and complete revelation of God's will for His people. Little wonder then that Paul came to understand that the Old Testament "Word" had served as a short-term "nanny" (Galatians 3:24,25) to care for God's people until Jesus, the final Word, assumed that role! In Jesus, God's eternal community and world had broken into a world of darkness and death. The entry point into that community was not descent from Abraham, but the forgiveness of sins won at the cross. The hope which was the focus was not some doubtful dream of a restored Davidic Kingdom, but the assurance of eternal life. Little wonder then that the early Christian community rejoiced to see itself freed from the multitude of Jewish laws, regulations and traditions; adopted to live under Jesus as Lord; and guided by one all-embracing divine directive, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:15,34).

## What We Confess

IN THE LIGHT OF THE ABOVE, there is reason to believe that the Apostles' Creed needs editing. To begin with, we would do well to add two words to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker and Owner of heaven and earth." In Genesis 1, God does not say, "Let humanity have *ownership* of creation." (After all, have you ever seen a U-Haul behind a hearse?) God says, "Let humanity have dominion over (responsible use of) creation." There is a world of difference between the two statements.

If we were to add these two words, "and Owner," to the Creed, people may learn to understand that there is no such thing as Christian "giving." When we place our so-called "gift" in the offering plate, we are not giving God anything. Contrary to what it says in the "blue book," we are not giving God but God's own! We are merely getting our grubby little hands off what has always belonged to God. In short, we are not called to practice Christian giving, but Christian management and Christian distribution, and this applies not merely to what we "give" on Sundays, but to our total use of life as we manage this planet to the glory of God and for the good of all. In short, money is not an entity in its own right. Money is stored servanthood. It is "me in a bank." The real challenge is not to teach people how to "give" money, but to teach them how to give and manage themselves that they may become more useful in serving God and others.

We would also do well to add some words to the Second Article of the Creed. We confess: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the

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Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." What comes next? "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." Why does the Creed jump from the crib to the cross? What happened in between? We should insert, "He walked the way of a humble Servant without limit." After "the third day He rose again from the dead," I would prefer to say, "He did not withdraw, but transformed His presence and will at the Last Day reappear. And when He finally reappears, He will welcome those who have believed and trusted Him, thank them for serving Him in His various disguises, and invite them into His eternal home to care for them forever."

We would do well to do a little work on the Third Article of the Creed. Why? There is no such thing as a secular realm. Though there is one world that God made and owns, two powers seek to control that world: The Kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Satan. Some today feel a little awkward about such references and suggest that we today have progressed beyond belief in a demonic realm. C.S. Lewis wrote, "There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan." Therefore, after stating that we believe in "the communion of saints," we should add, "and I believe in the existence of the unholy satanic spirit and the unholy demonic realm."

Though it is disturbing to hear people glibly deny the existence of God, it is even more troubling to hear them deny the existence of the demonic. It is important to understand what the demonic is as depicted by Jesus in the Gospels. The demonic is every spirit, power, person, being and influence that sidetracks us from being servants of God and others into living to serve ourselves. It is sad but true that we are surrounded by a business world that is out to persuade us to buy what we do not need with money we do not have to impress people who do not care. You have heard its messages: "Eat it, drink it, pour it down, fork it down, inhale it, sit in it, sail in it, fly in it, drive it, walk on it, sleep in it, wear it, paint it on, spray it on, dab it on, watch it, read it—all for you; you're Number One, and there's no harm in it." Through all this runs the cry: "Live only to enjoy yourself." In short, "Make what you can, can what you make, and sit on the lid." Here we do well to remember the statement of Juvenal, a Roman satirist who lived during the first century A.D.: "Luxury is more ruthless than war."

Let us try to anchor all this firmly on Planet Earth and relate it to some of the cliches that reveal only too well the flawed vision that many sitting in church pews have of Jesus' Person and ministry.

One hears and sees the message: "We must always strive to put God first in our lives." However, the Bible does not tell us to put God first. To put God first is to operate with a system of priorities; it implies that though we serve God first, we also serve other things as second, third and fourth. However, we Christians are not called to operate with priorities, but with options. We serve either God or what Luther defined as "the devil, the world, and our flesh." Jesus commands us to serve the Lord our God *only* (see Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:31; Matthew 4:10).

One hears and sees a second message: "We must see our Christianity as the most important part of life." However, Christianity is not an important part of life—not even the most important part of life. When Jesus calls us into His family, He does not call us to follow and serve Him *part-time*, but *full-time*. As Luther put it, "All Christians are priests; some are pastors." And again, "A housewife scrubbing the kitchen floor is doing a work as pleasing to God as a bishop preaching a sermon in a cathedral."

## Equipping God's Priests

THERE ARE TWO TRUTHS which we Christians need to understand. 1) As priests of God, we constantly handle sacred things. After all, everything we touch was made by God and belongs to God. 2) As priests of God we are to go to God for others (in prayer, for example), and to others for God. In short, we are to serve God full-time by serving others in whatever we do: as teachers, farmers, bankers, mechanics, factory workers, dentists, shop assistants—or whatever. That is what the priesthood of believers is all about!

We would do well if, instead of having only a cross on or above our altars, we put there also a representation of Planet Earth, and on it an image of Jesus, the Servant King, carrying His cross. Around Jesus we should have a circle of people holding hands in community, to remind us that we are never Christians in private. These symbols would speak a powerful message to worshipers: To belong to Jesus is to belong to Jesus' worldwide community and to be called to serve all within that community, regardless of color, race or sex! In the same vein, we would do well to put two signs in all worship facilities. One would be above the entrance door, and it would read, "Servants' Entrance." The other would be over the exit door, and it would read, "Ahead: Your Mission Field!"

If ever I were to become a college or seminary president (and I never will be!), I would lock every new student preparing to become a "professional church worker" into his or her quarters for the first six months (making sure, of course, that they had access to food, drink, bed and bathroom), provide them with the best English Bible available with the best footnotes available, and then let them out only when they could assure me that they knew every detail of every story and theme in the entire sweep of the Scripture. Furthermore, I would permit no one to do graduate work in systematics, church history or practical theology unless they had first totally mastered the biblical narrative and its themes. Why? The church is not built by academics, programs or methods, but by a Person!

I personally detest the phrase, "professional church workers." Seminaries and church colleges exist, first and foremost, to equip people to be *first* servants of Jesus and *second* leaders and equippers of people. Yes, leadership is important. However, unless so-called *leaders* are themselves first and foremost *followers* of Jesus, the danger is that they will want people to follow them and their ideas rather than the Person of Jesus. Preachers and teachers in the church are to model their message, and since that message has to do with a Servant King, they are to model their Servant King. Though an overstatement, I rather like what Francis of Assisi once said: "Preach the Gospel all the time; if necessary, use words."

Perhaps the most powerful depiction of Jesus outside of Scripture is by H.G. Wells (*Outline of History*, Vol. I, p. 425,6). Wells describes the impact Jesus made on those who met Him:

Jesus was too great for His disciples. And in view of what He said, is it any wonder that all who were rich and prosperous felt a horror of strange things, a swimming of their world at His teaching? Perhaps the priests and rulers and rich men understood Him better than His followers. He was dragging out all the little private reservations they had made from social service into the light of a universal religious life. He was like a terrible moral huntsman, digging man-

kind out of the snug burrows in which they had lived hitherto. In the white blaze of His kingdom there was to be no property, no privilege, no pride, no precedence, and no motive and reward but love. Is it any wonder that men were dazzled and blinded, and cried out against Him? Even His disciples cried out when He would not spare them that light. Is it any wonder that the priests realized that between this Man and themselves there was no choice but that He or their priestcraft should perish? Is it any wonder that the Roman soldiers, confronted and amazed by something soaring over their comprehension and threatening all their disciples, should take refuge in wild laughter, and crown Him with thorns, and robe Him in purple and make a mock Cæsar of Him? For to take Him seriously was to enter into a strange and alarming life, to abandon habits, to control instincts and impulses, to essay an incredible happiness. Is it any wonder that to this day this Galilean is too much for our small hearts?

To date, I have visited 50 countries and conducted seminars in 26 of them. There is little that is glamorous about what I do, but I do learn many things from those among whom I work. I learn, for example, that many Christians in overseas countries who are poor and have few facilities achieve more than many churches do in more affluent countries. Why? Because they must look to the Word, not to a facility, to achieve "church growth."

Unfortunately, some churches in the western world can afford to fund their incompetence and perpetuate their irrelevance. One of the dangers involved in belonging to an affluent church with a large staff and an extensive facility is that its member-families all too often entrust the Christian education of their children to the "professional staff." However, the "big stuff" that Jesus talked about is not the kind of stuff that little children can grasp. Though Jesus taught adults and played with children, tragically many churches today opt to do the opposite. True, we are to have a childlike faith—but never a childish (ecclesiastically suicidal) faith!

To summarize: the Church is faced with a single task: To equip its pastors, teachers and people to grapple with the mind, meaning and manner of Jesus. To achieve this, it must equip its pastors, teachers and people to become biblical rabbis, biblical bloodhounds. It must, above all else, equip parents to share and model the Word in the family circle every day in every way. Only then will God's people begin to understand that they are not called to go to church, but to be the Church! And only when these things are done will God's people learn to give the Galilean pride of place in their hearts and lives.



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# Martin Luther, Bible Reader

Robert Kolb



AMONG MY EARLIEST MEMORIES is a picture on the wall of my aunt's and uncle's living room: Martin Luther in defiant stance, clutching a Bible in his arm. Luther is often so depicted, for instance, in copies of the famous statue in Worms. He stands holding the Bible, confessing the faith, defending its truth.

In fact, Luther believed that the Word of God was capable of defending itself. He enjoyed confessing its message, but he found himself ever at its mercy, so to speak. He wanted to find himself under that Word; he subjected himself to its discipline. Pictures of the real relationship of Luther and the Bible should show the Scripture's impact on him. It exercised its power on him as he read it, devoured it, studied it with delight and a sense of adventure, as it opened his eyes and ears to ever more of the countless facets of God's message for human creatures. Snapshots of Luther and his Bible should show him preaching its message into the hearts of the Wittenberg congregation or lecturing on it to students at the University, feeding the congregation and the students the milk and meat of the Word as appropriate for each.

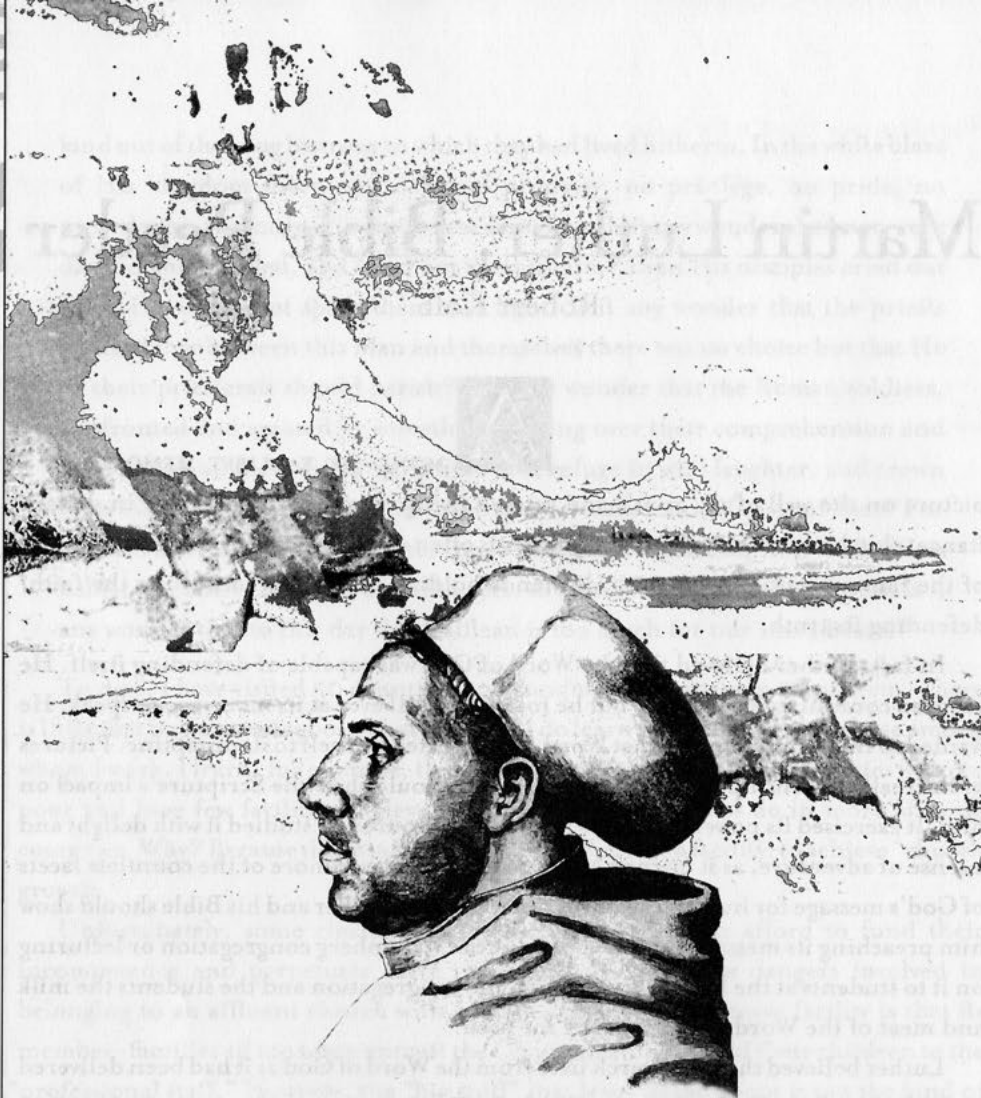
Luther believed that the church lives from the Word of God as it had been delivered to God's people in the Scriptures. "The holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the Holy Word of God," he wrote in 1539. He conceded that not all have it in equal measure: "Some possess the Word in its complete purity; others do not." Nonetheless, it is the Word of God which makes all Christian people holy, "for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches; it is indeed the very holiness of God."<sup>1</sup> The reading, understanding, and use of Scripture are directed by the Holy Spirit, who exercises his power and deposits his truth in those who read the Bible. This power, as it comes through the words of the apostles and prophets, gives birth to the children of God. This truth sustains and nourishes his church. The whole company of God's people lives together, rooted and growing together in the words of the Bible, which bring the presence and power of God to them.

## Luther's Bible for the Laity

IN LUTHER'S DAY many people were illiterate, and so he strove to introduce the words of Scripture into the lives of even illiterate people through his catechism. He wrote his *Small Catechism* in such a form that it would carry the chief message of Scripture orally into the people's lives. He wanted them to memorize it, to digest it and to use it as they went about living out the life God had set before them.

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This is  
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Luther knew that Christian instruction takes place best and most fundamentally in small groups, and so he charged the heads of households of his day—for households were a natural form of small group—to educate children and servants within the extended family. Luther presumed that this fundamental biblical instruction would result in a knowledge not only of the Gospel itself but also of the course that God planned for daily life. Therefore he organized his catechism so that it found its completion in the ethical instruction of the *Table of Responsibilities*. Nonetheless, the heart of the Scripture was always, for Martin Luther, Jesus Christ.

### Luther Rendezvoused with Jesus in the Bible

IN SCRIPTURE LUTHER DID NOT FIND merely a collection of wise sayings. He did not find merely good instruction or information for understanding the secrets of the universe. He found in the pages of Scripture the power of God. He found there a person, or better said, he was found there by this person, his God, as he ventured into the Bible.

“Search the Scriptures, for it is they that bear witness to me” (John 5:39), Luther read, and he began his orientation for readers of the Old Testament with this tip.<sup>2</sup> Open the Bible, Luther believed, and you will be confronted by a person, Jesus Christ. This person does not simply put Himself before you as an object of your study. This person will grab you, will change your life, will make you a new person. Opening the Bible, as Luther had experienced, is risky business for the sinner. For sinners die when they fall under the claim of the person who dwells in the Scriptures.

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# Open the Bible and the power of God Springs forth from its words.

Luther understood the Bible as far more than a collection of neutral, objective observations about truth and life. He knew that its words are dynamite. Open the Bible, and the power of God springs forth from its words. This power will raze the rotting, collapsing edifice of the sinner's life, and this power will raise up a new temple, where the Holy Spirit dwells, dedicated to God's purposes, functioning as home both to the Spirit and to the homeless people whom God sends to us to find a haven in our lives.

In describing how God's Word works, Luther emphasized the “living voice of the Gospel.” He meant thereby the oral conveying of the biblical message which Christians shape appropriately for one another in specific situations. In this way fellow Christians receive that facet of God's Word which they need at that moment to hear. Luther knew as well, however, that the written words on the pages of Scripture come alive as the Holy Spirit pierces hearts with their condemnation or their consolation, as the words on those pages are read. That the language of the prophets and apostles springs from the page into the heart is what he knew from his own experience. Luther believed that the Bible could spring into his heart and the hearts of all readers because he believed that the God who had become one of us could speak directly to our lives and hearts.

### The Bible as a Mirror for Life

THE STORIES OF THE BIBLE reflected life as Luther had experienced it. Heinrich Bornkamm has observed that the peasant culture of ancient Israel did resemble that of late medieval Germany in which Luther grew up. Therefore, Luther found in the accounts of the lives of the patriarchs and the prophets a “mirror of life.”<sup>3</sup> Not only similarities between Israel and contemporary Germany permitted Luther to find reality in the biblical pages, however. He recognized the same temptations and frailties, the same rebellion and regrets, in Abraham and Jacob that he found in himself. He found the same simple and often stubborn faith in Sarah or Rebecca that he encountered in his own wife. He knew that the joys and sorrows, the remorse and the relief in the mercy of God which he experienced were close akin to those of David. He was confronted by the accusing finger of God's law and the forgiving and life-restoring power of the Gospel in Isaiah's and Paul's words just as in those of his own pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen.

The mirror of life which God sets before us in the biblical accounts “is written for our comfort.” For example, Luther wrote, “God allows even his great saints to falter, especially in adversity. For before Job comes into fear of death, he praises God at the theft of his goods and the death of children. But when death is in prospect, and God

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withdraws himself, Job's words show what kind of thoughts a man, however holy he may be, holds toward God: he thinks that God is not God, but only a judge and wrathful tyrant, who storms ahead and cares nothing about the goodness of a person's life." Luther found this "the finest part of this book," for it matched his experience of suffering the wrath and judgment of God while his grace was hidden.<sup>4</sup>

### Luther's Guide for Reading the Bible

LUTHER KNEW THAT THE ORDINARY, common human language of the biblical writers can sometimes confuse readers. Therefore, he suggested to the readers of his translation of the book of Romans that they have a firm basis for plunging into Scripture. For Luther understood a great deal about how human language and human thought function. He recognized that people form their thoughts on the basis of key concepts and definitions of concepts, which determine the way in which they process information they gather. Thus, as he provided a guide for readers of the epistle to the Romans, he discussed the conceptual framework which readers needed if they wanted to comprehend Paul's message. Luther's fundamentals for interpreting this letter still can serve as a road map for finding our way through the entire biblical revelation.

The first of Luther's guiding presuppositions lay in the word "law—not to be taken in human fashion as a teaching about what works are to be done or not done." Instead, the law expressed the claim of God on all of human life, first of all, the claim on the trust which constitutes the core of the human personality. No one can satisfy the law; unless it is performed from the bottom of the human heart, it remains an instrument of God's wrath and arouses only hostility in the heart. "To fulfill the law, however, is to do its works with pleasure and love, to live a godly and good life of one's own accord, without the compulsion of the law," and that is possible only through the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the Spirit's guidance the law remains only a temptation to work out our own way to God, or it becomes a hammer blow of his unrelenting wrath. The law accuses; the law crushes; the law kills the sinner.

Luther's second overarching concept was that of sin. He did not want to view sin chiefly as the designation for what people do apart from God. Instead the root and source of such sins is the original sin of unbelief in the inmost heart, "the root, the sap, and the chief power of all sin."<sup>6</sup> This sin of rejecting God as Lord lies at the heart of the human predicament.

Luther distinguished between two closely related words to make the presupposition concerning God's fundamental attitude toward fallen human creatures clear. "Gift" is Paul's word for what the Holy Spirit gives believers in terms of abilities and opportunities for service in the horizontal realm of life. "Grace" is "God's favor, or the good will which in himself he bears toward us, by which he is disposed to give us Christ and to pour into us the Holy Spirit with his gifts."<sup>7</sup> Luther did not want his readers to confuse God's fundamental disposition toward us with the important incidentals He adds to our lives to enrich them. He carefully distinguished God's loving favor from the results of that loving favor, His gifts for daily life.

Obviously, Luther viewed "faith" as a key window into the message of Paul, and all biblical writers, for that matter.

Faith is not the human notion and dream that some people call faith. It is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God . . . O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to

**Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace**

be doing good works incessantly . . . Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times.<sup>7</sup>

The Holy Spirit bestows the knowledge of and confidence in God's grace which makes believers "bold and happy" in carrying out the tasks God calls his people to perform in daily life.<sup>8</sup>

Foundational for Luther's thought was his discovery of the distinction between two kinds of human righteousness: what makes human creatures human in relationship first of all to God and secondly to other human creatures. Luther designated the former "passive" because it is the gift of life in God, the gift of His favor, of a good relationship with Him. This righteousness is our identity as children of God, received with as little contribution as we made to becoming a child of the parents who conceived us. Our righteousness in relationship to other people is, on the other hand, a righteousness of human performance. We do what is right according to God's plan for human living. By acting as children of God we prove the identity he has given us. We do so without any merit or worthiness in us as children of God in the vertical relationship with Him.<sup>9</sup>

Faith is the constitutive factor in this vertical righteousness, Luther believed, and so he defined trust in God, as He has revealed Himself in Christ, as "righteousness in God's sight" because "God gives it and counts it as righteousness for the sake of Christ our Mediator." This righteousness becomes the basis for acting out the other kind of righteousness, which consists in deeds of love, performed by the believer.<sup>10</sup>

Luther's final signposts for finding one's way through the epistle to the Romans were the opposing concepts of "flesh" and "spirit." These do not designate material and spiritual or outward and inward aspects or realms of human life. "Flesh" in the Bible designates everything which turns body and soul, mind and senses against God. The most important and worst of the works of the flesh is unbelief. On the other hand, the believer who is spiritual "lives and works, inwardly and outwardly, in the service of the Spirit and of the future life," even in the midst of the most mundane of daily activities, even when washing the feet of others, as did Christ, or when steering a boat and fishing, as did Peter.<sup>11</sup>

Luther concluded that "without such a grasp of these words, you will never understand this letter of Saint Paul, nor any other book of Holy Scripture." Even the most famous of the theologians of the church are not to be trusted if they do not understand biblical vocabulary in this way.<sup>12</sup> These concepts provide a framework for reading all of Scripture. For they help frame the right questions which are to be asked regarding life, and they set in place the presuppositions which help the reader define and understand other terms and their development and application by the biblical writers.

### Biblical Words in Daily Life

THE ENTIRE SCRIPTURE speaks directly to the crises and crosses of human life. Above all, the Psalms function as the healing and resurrecting power of God in such situations.

A human heart is like a ship on a wild sea, driven by the storm winds from the four corners of the world. Here it is struck with fear and worry about impending disaster; there comes grief and sadness because of present evil. Here breathes

a breeze of hope and of anticipated happiness; there blows security and joy in present blessings. These storm winds teach us to speak with earnestness, to open the heart and pour out what lies at the bottom of it. He who is stuck in fear and need speaks of misfortune quite differently from him who floats on joy; and he who floats on joy speaks and sings of joy quite differently from him who is stuck in fear . . . What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid these storm winds of every kind? Where does one find finer words of joy than in the Psalms of praise and thanksgiving?<sup>13</sup>

Luther took great delight in the bouquets of flowers of the heart which the rain of God's Word causes to grow in the human spirit, with the Psalms presenting such fine examples of these bouquets of joy. On the other hand, he asked, "Where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation?" There gloom and darkness shroud the heart's forebodings about God's wrath. Thus, the Psalms give voice to the deepest emotions of God's saints and unite them in the same songs of praise and lament. The Psalms also instruct the saints and train them in expressing joys, fears, hopes and sorrows. The words of the psalmists, like those of all the prophets and apostles, teach, inspire, educate and motivate.

### Using Scripture in a Luther-like Way

FOR THOSE WHO THIRST FOR INSPIRATION, motivation, and insights into what human life is all about, Luther's example and programs for reading the Scriptures still serve as mighty examples for people at the turn of the twenty-first century. So many people in our society are on a personal quest for spiritual certainty not unlike Luther's. Many feel the same kind of despair and alienation which bedeviled Luther's early life. Many have gone out in search of God and found doors closed or bottomless pits opening up before them on a variety of paths.

Luther came to know that his quest for God had brought him only deeper into despair. He knew that it was God's quest for him that had brought him peace and joy. Luther recognized that God had come to confront him in the very pages of the Bible. Luther found that he could not hear the true voice of God in the depth of his own soul or in the whisperings of the wind, but only in the movement of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit arises from the biblical page with the story of the way, the truth, and the life in Jesus Christ.

Luther enjoyed individual Bible study, and he experienced the power of the Holy Spirit as he sat alone with the Scriptures. On the other hand, as lonely as Luther often was, he was no loner. He knew that God had brought people into human families of various sociological units so that we may be God's instruments for strengthening one another. Luther believed that God makes His own presence known and felt through the encouragement and support of Christian brothers and sisters. Therefore he encouraged families to study the Scriptures together and to find in them God's messages of wrath against our sinfulness and of forgiveness and life for us as His children.

For the life of the Christian congregation in the twenty-first century, it is absolutely imperative that Luther's model be taken seriously and that Bible study be encouraged in a variety of forms and at every level. Congregations need to help families and individuals read the Bible with a tuned ear and a focused eye for the truth that lies within it. In our society it is also important to gather small groups of like-minded and like-

**It is absolutely imperative that Luther's model be taken seriously.**

interested Christians for Bible study. In such groups we can help one another gain insights for our own particular needs, both perceived and unperceived. We also can be disciplined by the eyes and the minds of others. For all of us bring our own presuppositions to the biblical page, and we need the discipline of the church, of fellow Christians, to help us see what its writers truly intended.

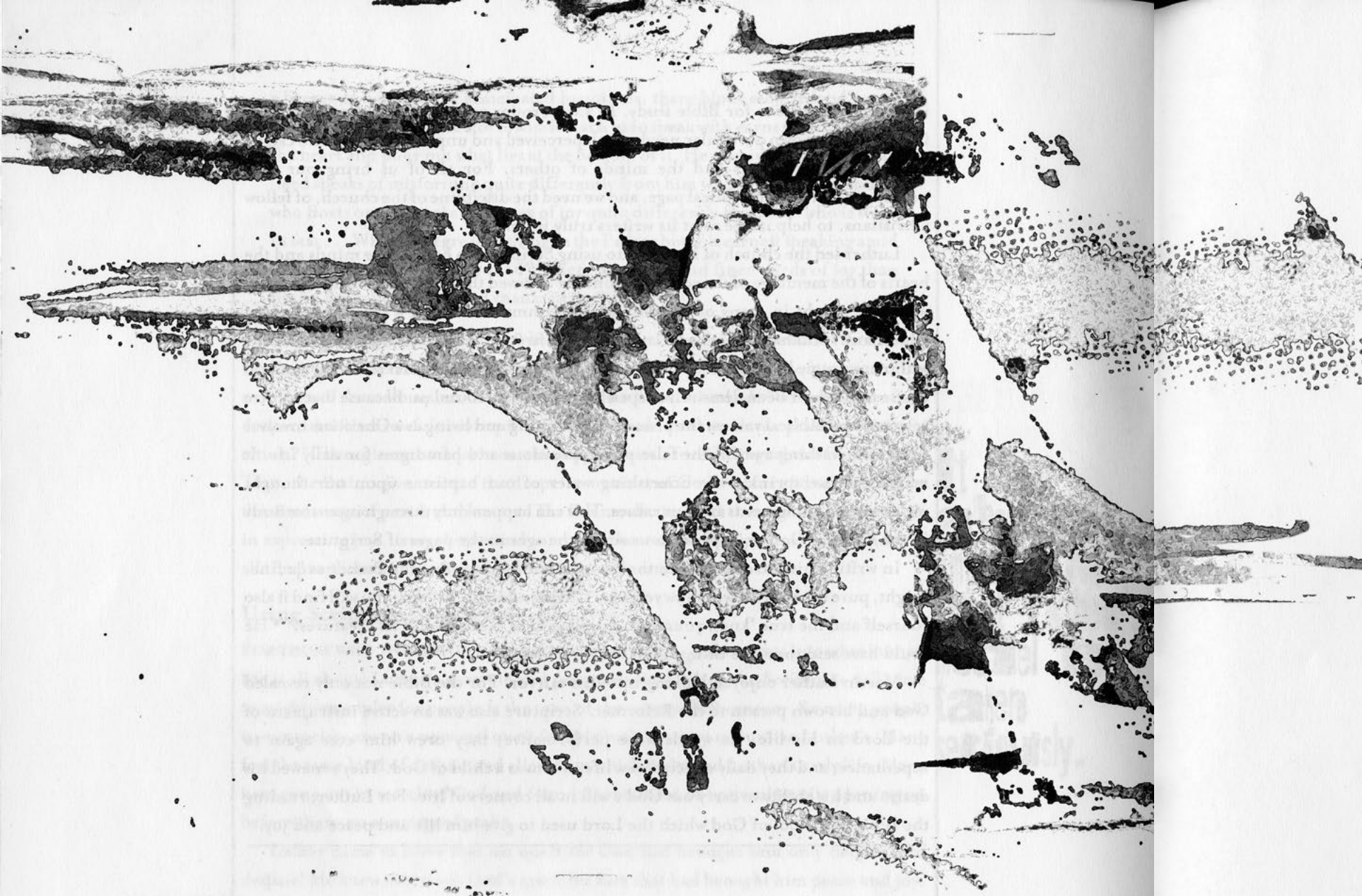
Luther led the church of his day into using Scripture to baptize the minds and the hearts of the members of the congregation. He believed that most Christians of his day were still caught in many of the old pagan rhythms of life that a thousand years of Christianity still had not erased. In the twenty-first century Christian congregations will increasingly have more and more members who were not born as Christians and whose minds have been decisively shaped by the culture around us. Because that culture rejects many biblical values, the process of becoming and living as a Christian involves a genuine washing away of the false presuppositions and paradigms for daily life. It means that we sprinkle the nourishing water of our baptisms upon our thought processes, our judgments and our values. That can happen only through intensive study of the Word of God as it speaks to us across the ages in the pages of Scripture.

In writing his introduction to the Psalms, Luther describes the Psalter as "a fine, bright, pure mirror that will show you what Christendom is. Indeed, you will find it also yourself and the true 'know yourself!' as well as God Himself and all creatures."<sup>14</sup> He could have said the same thing about the whole Bible.

Martin Luther enjoyed looking into this mirror. For the Bible not only revealed God and his own person to the Reformer. Scripture also was an active instrument of the Lord in his life. Its words were performative: they drew him ever again to repentance, and they daily effected new life in him as a child of God. They renewed his desire and his ability to carry out God's will in all corners of life. For Luther, reading the Bible was a tool of God which the Lord used to give him life and peace and joy.

### Notes

- 1 *Luther's Works* (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955-1986), 41:148-149.
- 2 *Luther's Works* 35:235.
- 3 Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric and Ruth Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 11.
- 4 *Luther's Works* 35:252.
- 5 *Luther's Works* 35:366-369.
- 6 *Luther's Works* 35:369.
- 7 *Luther's Works* 35:369.
- 8 *Luther's Works* 35:370-371.
- 9 See his tract of 1518, "On the Two Kinds of Righteousness," *Luther's Works* 31:297-306 and the preface to his lectures on Galatians, published in 1535, *Luther's Works* 26:7-12.
- 10 *Luther's Works* 35:371.
- 11 *Luther's Works* 35:371-372.
- 12 *Luther's Works* 35:372.
- 13 *Luther's Works* 35:255.
- 14 *Luther's Works* 35:255-257.



**WESLEYAN**

## A Positive Mindset for Studying the Scriptures

# NEEDED:



Thomas J. Doyle

### What Is a Mindset toward the Study of Scripture?

What do each of the following responses have in common?

"No. I had my fill of that in junior high."

"Yes. It meets my needs."

"No. It's not meaningful to me."

"Yes. It helps me deal with challenges in life."

"No. I just don't have the time."

"Yes. It's one of the most important hours of the week."

"No. Why should I?"



Each statement was made by a person asked, "Do you attend Bible study? Why?" These individual responses evidence various mindsets toward the study of Scripture, ranging from positive to extremely negative.

Statistical information reported by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod indicates the mindset of its communicant members toward Bible study. In 1995 the congregations of the LCMS reported that approximately 18 percent of communicant members attended a Sunday morning or weekday Bible study. (*The Lutheran Annual*, 1996). Simple mathematics enables us to speculate that 82 percent of communicant members of the LCMS do not possess at this time a positive mindset toward involvement in the study of Scripture.

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God promises in Isaiah 55:11, “. . . so is My Word that goes out from My mouth: It will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God desires for all people to “go out in joy and be led forth in peace” (Isaiah 55:12) as they experience the faith creating and faith strengthening power of the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word.

But today many people choose not to involve themselves in an opportunity to receive the faith strengthening power found only in Scripture. They do not have a positive mindset toward the study of Scripture. Their mindset toward Bible study causes them to choose not to participate.

### **How Do People Develop a Positive Mindset toward the Study of Scripture?**

PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS of Bible study often will determine their mindset toward studying Scripture. These perceptions may be valid or not, rooted in a lack of experience or previous experiences, and based upon need and relevance.

I first met Bill on the opening day of Vacation Bible School (VBS). He had responded to our congregation’s neighborhood canvass. Since Bill had recently received custody of his three-year-old daughter after a bitter divorce, he constantly looked for new opportunities to provide his daughter with positive experiences. Although he had no past experience with the organized church, he thought “religion” might be good for his daughter.

As Bill filled out the VBS registration card, I introduced myself to him and invited him to attend a parenting class that would be held as children attended classes. Bill said, “A parenting class . . . might be very helpful.” Bill indicated that he probably couldn’t attend every day, since his work schedule might not permit it. When Bill arrived at the second session, I said, “Glad your work schedule allows you to attend again today.” Bill responded, “I changed my work schedule so that I could attend. The first session was so helpful, I didn’t want to miss the next.”

Bill’s mindset toward the study of Scripture was changing.

Throughout the week we explored what God’s Word had to say about parenting, specifically as it related to communication. The course emphasized the practical implications of God’s Word as it pertained to parenting. Also, parents had many opportunities to share their experiences—joys, sorrows, challenges. We confessed regularly together that we had failed at times as parents. During those moments God’s Word spoke to us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). As we laid our mistakes, our sins, at the foot of the cross, we were reminded once again by God, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:98). God’s love for us in Christ Jesus revealed in His Word empowered and renewed us as parents.

As the week-long class came to an end, Bill said, “I need more of this. This sure gave me practical help in being a better parent.” We agreed as a group to continue to meet throughout the remainder of the summer on a weekly basis on Sunday mornings.

When the parenting Bible study ended, Bill and a number of the participants from that summer parenting class agreed to continue to meet together to study God’s Word. They were integrated into other Bible studies offered in the congregation. These included money management classes, divorce recovery seminars, biblical book studies, parenting courses and other thematic studies. Bill continued to attend Sunday morning Bible study regularly and weekday Bible studies as his schedule permitted. At times he would bring friends to Bible study.

About a year and a half after I had first met Bill, he participated in an adult instruction class for membership in our congregation. Soon after completion of the course, he and his daughter were baptized.

Bill’s change of mindset was complete. Bill had developed a positive mindset toward Bible study.

A person with little experience in Bible study may simply not have developed a positive mindset toward the study of Scripture. In order to develop a positive mindset toward Scriptural study, this person will need to be convinced that Bible study meets a felt need in practical and relevant ways. People who possess positive mindsets toward Scriptural study can be role models to people with little biblical background. Their words and actions that demonstrate they “go out in joy” and are “led in peace” will encourage the person with little or no experience to capture that same joy and peace. When people who have positive mindsets toward Scripture share the importance of Bible study in strengthening their faith in Jesus and in helping them through their day-to-day experiences, they demonstrate how Scripture can be practical and relevant in meeting needs.

Monique was a member of our congregation who never attended Bible study and rarely attended worship. Our congregation’s practice was to offer First Communion to young people in sixth grade if their parents attended First Communion classes for six weeks with their children and then participated with the pastor to determine whether or not the child was ready to receive the Lord’s Supper.

Since all parents with children in the sixth grade received the letter inviting them to the First Communion classes, Monique responded by saying she and her daughter planned to attend. She attended the first two sessions and then stopped attending. After the fourth session I called Monique and told her that we missed her and her daughter in class. Monique asked if she could meet with me to discuss the class. I agreed.

Monique came to my office a few days later. She told me that she decided to stop attending classes because she didn’t want her daughter to live with the same guilt she had experienced since the day she was confirmed. I invited her to describe her guilt.

Monique began her story: “When I was in confirmation class, the pastor taught us that we should receive the Lord’s Supper only if we were worthy. He said that if we took the body and blood of Jesus in an unworthy manner we would take it to our damnation. I rarely, if ever, take the Lord’s Supper because I never feel I’m worthy . . . and . . . if I am not worthy I will go to hell.” Tears began to

# God promises that His Word will not return Empty.

form in the corners of Monique's eyes. She went on to explain, "Many times I get up and begin down the aisle to take Holy Communion. But then I remember my unworthiness and go back to my seat and sit down. I'm afraid that I am not worthy enough. I don't want my daughter to experience the same kind of guilt I have experienced year-after-year, Sunday-after-Sunday."

I told Monique, "We are never worthy on our own. Jesus went to the cross and has made you worthy through His blood. Whenever you receive the body and blood in faith, you are worthy. . . God in Christ has made you worthy to receive His Meal." As I shared the biblical meaning of worthiness, tears of joy streamed down Monique's face. Her guilt, the guilt she had experienced for 15 years, began to melt.

Monique once again began attending the First Communion class with her daughter. On the Sunday that Monique's daughter received her First Communion, so did Monique—worthily.

After the First Communion class ended, Monique decided to join the adult instruction class. She said, "I was confused about the Lord's Supper. I want to find out if there is anything else that I don't understand."

In later conversations Monique explained that for years she had attended worship only out of guilt. She never attended Bible class because she had reasoned that a Christian education experience caused her to experience guilt. Why would she ever want to subject herself to more guilt by attending another Bible study?

To my knowledge Monique continues to attend Bible study regularly to experience the peace and joy that only God in Christ can provide.

In many ways it may be more difficult to help a person develop a positive mindset who, because of past experiences, has a negative mindset toward studying Scripture than a person who has had little or no Bible study experience. Whether the negative experiences are rooted in fact or fiction, they need to be dealt with in positive ways.

Negative past experiences might include one or more of the following: poor religious education instruction, a negative past experience with the church, little or no perceived relevancy for life, lack of parental involvement or modeling, fear of failure, or in Monique's case a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of Scriptural teachings. In order to once again involve this person in Bible study you need to use motivators that meet perceived needs such as parent helps, marriage enrichment, a free meal, money management seminar, fellowship experience, or baby-sitting service. These motivators may get a person with a negative mindset toward Bible study to attend once or even twice, but it will not keep that person attending. Instead, this person must have positive experiences over a period of time in order first to challenge and then change their negative mindset. These experiences must meet perceived needs and be practical and relevant to everyday life. A person's mindset becomes increasingly positive as the Holy Spirit has opportunity to work through the Word to strengthen faith and in so doing provide joy and peace.

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## Practical Ideas to Help People Develop a Positive Mindset toward the Study of Scripture

ALTHOUGH EXPERIENCES DIFFER from person-to-person, the following programmatic suggestions and adaptations can help to change a negative mindset toward the study of Scripture and/or develop a positive mindset toward Scripture.

- Provide a variety of Bible studies at different times throughout the week.
- Provide Bible study experiences that speak to the needs of people in your congregation and community.
- Respond to possible excuses in proactive ways (provide a meal, offer child care, develop classes for children, schedule classes more than one time during the week).
- Train Bible study leaders in theology and methods.
- Invite people to Bible study through written and/or verbal invitations (verbal are much more powerful).
- Have special Bible study experiences or events—a short term, non-threatening parenting course, grandparenting Bible study, marriage enrichment, and intergenerational family experiences.
- If they won't attend the Bible study, bring the Bible study to them. Many people will attend meetings and/or other activities, but they will not attend Bible study. Start the meetings/activities with a 5-to-10-minute Bible study experience.
- Use Christ-centered and Bible-based materials that have a strong life application.
- Lower the threshold of fear by printing Bible passages or pairing a regular Bible study participant with a newcomer.
- Talk to people about that which God can provide as the Holy Spirit works through the Word. Encourage Bible study participants to share with at least one person a week the importance of Bible study in their lives.
- Keep careful attendance. Make verbal contact with those participants who stop attending.
- Send surveys to members' families, or better yet, canvass the congregation at the beginning or end of worship to determine possible topics of interest for Bible study.
- Publicize special Bible study events in local or neighborhood newspapers.

## A Positive Mindset toward Studying Scripture

People who at first might have a negative mindset toward the study of Scripture will experience through their participation in Bible study the faith strengthening and faith enriching power of the Holy Spirit. How do I know this? Because God promises that His Word will not return empty (Isaiah 55:11). The Holy Spirit working through God's Word can and will transform even the most negative mindset into a positive mindset that enables participants "to go out in joy and be led forth in peace."

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## Bible Study Resources for Congregations

### The Bethel Series

The Bethel Series is an adult biblical study program that has been the flagship for adult Christian education for 37 years.

Its purpose is twofold: first, to train and develop Bible teachers and lay leaders; and second, to raise the level of biblical literacy in the congregation.

Using an overview approach, and outlining major themes that tie it all together, the student is led through the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation.

The end result is a thorough knowledge of the content of Scripture, so that no matter where a student is reading or studying, that section will be understood in relationship to the whole.

The Bethel Series leaves it to the pastor/teacher to bring to the study the level of understanding he wants the people to have. With such hands-on control the pastor is able to shape the material according to his own theological understanding and experience.

It begins with the pastor attending a ten-day orientation clinic where he is introduced to the underlying principles of the Bethel Series, taken through the material lesson-by-lesson and shown how to develop and make it his own.

After the pastor has trained his Bethel teachers, they in turn will teach congregational classes. At this level the material is divided into six seven-lesson units to be taught in six seven-week semesters over two years. This format works well for busy people reluctant to make long-term commitments. Seven-week segments of one hour a week are very manageable for most people.

A unique emphasis of the Bethel Series is on helping the students learn to think Hebrew and get in touch with the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Emphasis is also placed on the relevance of the biblical text to everyday living in the contemporary world.

Each of the forty lessons is provided with a picture that symbolically represents the major biblical concepts of that particular lesson. Thus the students are able to visualize what they are learning, and the pictures become a valuable learning tool. The students not only hear but also "see" what they are learning.

Administration assistance is provided throughout in order to ensure the success of the program. Procedures for selecting and recruiting teacher trainees and for launching the congregational phase have been well-developed and tested over time and in a variety of congregations.

The Bethel Series is not a means to an end, but rather a means to a beginning. It provides a solid biblical foundation which undergirds and

strengthens every ministry in which the church is engaged. It provides the basis for the development of an ongoing adult Christian education program designed to "equip the saints for the work of ministry."

This quote from a satisfied pastor says it best: "The Bethel Series has been one of the most superb disciple-making contexts that I have experienced in thirty years of ministry."

Interested? Call 1-800-462-2335, and we will send you more information and a ten-minute promotional video.

**Rev. R. Dorne Cornish**  
Executive Director  
The Bethel Series  
Madison, Wisconsin 53708

### Crossways International Bible Study Programs

Crossways International (CI) offers a number of programs at different levels of intensity, all of which make extensive use of teaching graphics (nearly 300 in all). The graphics are reproduced within the various study manuals and are available for use by teachers in the form of full-color overhead transparencies or black and white laminated charts. A leader's manual and study tapes are available for each course. All programs are designed for large or small group study and intend to teach people how to probe the biblical text with understanding and to translate what they learn into servant-ministry. Churches wishing to make use of CI's materials are strongly encouraged, though not required, to attend a three-day or five-day training seminar. The programs available are:

1. *Crossways*, 870 pages, 147 full-page illustrations. The biblical narrative and its themes are presented in detail. The 60 units are divided into six sections, each of which can be purchased separately.

2. *The Divine Drama*, 300 pages, 128 full-page illustrations. The 30 units are divided into two major sections: The first 15 units (*The Biblical Narrative*) probe the biblical narrative in less detail than *Crossways*. The second 15 units (*Our Narrative*) study the basic Christian doctrines that emerge from the narrative and text.

3. *See Through the Scriptures* makes use of 40 color illustrations with an accompanying text on the facing page to introduce the biblical narrative and its themes at a basic level to Bible "beginners" (teenagers and adults).

4. *Time Line*: In August, 1997, CI introduced a new and greatly improved full-color time line that makes use of 23 illustrations and explanatory text to outline the biblical narrative from Creation to Christ. A small booklet using 16 illustrations serves as a "follow-on" to explain the events and themes of the New Testament as they relate to Jesus. A truly beginner's course. (Note that the time line is supplied as an adjunct to all CI's courses.)

5. *Probing the Parables*: CI has taken Dr. Ken Bailey's fascinating studies on Jesus' parables in Luke's "Travel Document" (Luke 9:51-19:28) to produce a 10-unit course that makes use of fascinating Middle East insights and vivid graphics to make the parables come alive in a remarkable way.

At the present time CI is developing approximately ten additional short courses which will be available during the latter part of 1997 and early 1998.

**Dr. Harry Wendt**, Director  
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612-832-5454; Fax 612-832-5553

### LifeLight Bible Study

Suppose you could get people in your congregation thinking about the Word of God and studying the Scripture for a few minutes almost every day of the week. Suppose those people would get together once a week to share what they have discovered about the Bible chapter they have been studying. Suppose you had a chance to talk to them after this discussion, highlighting important truths, explaining difficult doctrines, clarifying the Law/Gospel focus. What do you imagine may happen in the hearts and lives of the people involved? In your own life?

Such a program of in-depth Bible study does exist. It is called LifeLight, and for the past ten years the Lord Jesus has been using it to draw His people closer to Himself as He feeds them on His Word.

The LifeLight program encourages participants to study whole books of the Bible, nine weeks at a time. Bible study done in this way has much to commend it. Participants see passages

set in their context. The courses can explore the Bible book themes the original authors developed. Participants get a better sense of the then-and-there meaning, so they can determine more appropriately the here-and-now applications of the Bible texts.

Because learners differ in the ways they learn best, LifeLight employs several strategies.

- Learners read the text on their own and answer questions about both facts and applications during the five days before the class meets. This takes about 20 minutes each day.
- When the group gathers, they participate in a brief devotion that focuses on one of the main concepts that grows from the text everyone has studied.
- After this worship time, the large group breaks into smaller groups of from 6 to 12 participants. These smaller groups share their insights from the work they have done on the text. They also encourage one another, challenge one another, and pray for one another during their time together and through the week as well. Most congregations schedule about 45 minutes of small-group time.
- After the small-group time, the entire class assembles for a 20-minute lecture/wrap up. This serves to reinforce the main points of the text under study. Some groups also use this time to answer questions that have arisen during the small-group process.
- Then, as a final wrap-up, each participant receives a review leaflet to take home. Besides a redaction of the lecture, this leaflet also includes two pages of enrichment material meant to highlight important historical, doctrinal or application points drawn from the text. They also receive a study leaflet with the reading assignments and questions for the coming week.

The power of LifeLight speaks for itself. During the past ten years, over 500,000 LifeLight courses have reached the hearts of learners. This is over five million lessons, or to put it another way, 20 million hours that God's people have spent in His Word learning to know their Savior better and better!

Concordia Publishing House plans to revise the LifeLight series for use into the next century. The first course in the revised series will be available in September of 1999. New courses will appear in the present series each year until then. The newest courses are Daniel (August, 1997); Selected Psalms (January, 1998); and the Life of David (July, 1998).

**Jane Fryar**  
Curriculum Developer  
Concordia Publishing House  
St. Louis, MO 63118

### The Logos Program: A Midweek Miracle

From early fall to late spring, churches across our country (and in Russia) in more than 25 denominations bustle with midweek activity. This energy is due to the excitement, fun and fellowship of The Logos Program, a design for midweek ministry with youth and children and their families in the local church. It is a "structured retreat" in the middle of the week for children in kindergarten through high school. Children, youth and adults sing, talk, learn, work and play together. . . giving everyone a chance to be a part of the fellowship and family of God in their churches.

The Logos Program is "the theology and practice of Christian relationships in a disciplined, midweek, four-part context." This design for nurture ministry fosters and makes possible the growth of intergenerational relationships that bond the entire congregation into a caring community of faith. In weekly sessions of 3½ to 4 hours for 25-30 weeks during the school year, children and youth participate in:

- Bible Study—grade level courses of Scripture study, taught by committed teachers, that challenge and nurture into obedient, biblically-informed discipleship.
- Worship Skills—involving children and youth in the worship life of the church primarily, but not exclusively, through choir.
- Playtime—experiencing great fun at the expense of no one else through athletics, hobbies, crafts, drama and recreational activities of all kinds, experienced in groups of adults and young people.
- Family Time (dinner hour)—"family groups" of children or youth and "table parents" enjoying a joyous shared meal that celebrates the family of God.

According to Rev. Tom Mendenhall, pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Hutchinson, Kansas, whose congregation has been involved in The Logos Program for 15 years, "Children, youth and adults are engaged every week in Christian education and nurture in all aspects of The Logos Program, whether they are setting tables, playing games, preparing a choral offering for the Sunday worship service or retelling a Bible story. They are experiencing Christian community and what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ as they pray, study, eat, play, sing and work together."

The Book of Acts (2:42) outlines the activities that nurtured the first century church into such powerful life and witness: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Here, there is an indication of the excitement and growth of the Christian community as it devoted itself to the disciplines of worship, Scripture study, shared meals and fellowship. Each week in The Logos Program these same four elements combine to provide a contemporary spiritual context in which true Christian relationships can grow and faith can develop today as in the first century church. These four elements are still essential in "setting the right conditions" for growth in faith to happen.

The Logos Program does not replace other programs of Christian education in the local church. Instead, because of the extent and quality of the relationships developed by The Logos Program, the established programs of Sunday school and youth ministry are strengthened with new viability and become more effective arms of the church's ministry.

The Logos Program is found in churches as small as 50 members or as large as 4,000. Located in city, suburb or rural settings, church after church reports decisive increases in worship attendance, high school participation and adult education programs, and new and deeper understandings of discipleship among the people of their congregations. When developed and maintained properly in a congregation, The Logos System will generate a participation of 75 percent to 90 percent of the potential children and youth of the church, and weekly attendance will average at least 90 percent. This requires real work and disciplined effort by the pastor(s), church staff, officers and parents, and a high level of commitment from the members of the congregation. But then it was our Lord who said to His church: "Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matthew 18:14).

For more information, write or call. . .

The Logos System Associates  
1405 Frey Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15235  
Phone: 412-372-1341  
Fax: 412-372-8447

or join The Logos Program online at:  
logos-request@ecunet.org  
(Include the word SUBSCRIBE in the body of the message.)

So is my word that  
goes out from My  
mouth: It will not  
return to Me empty, but  
will accomplish what I  
desire and achieve  
the purpose for  
which I sent it.

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