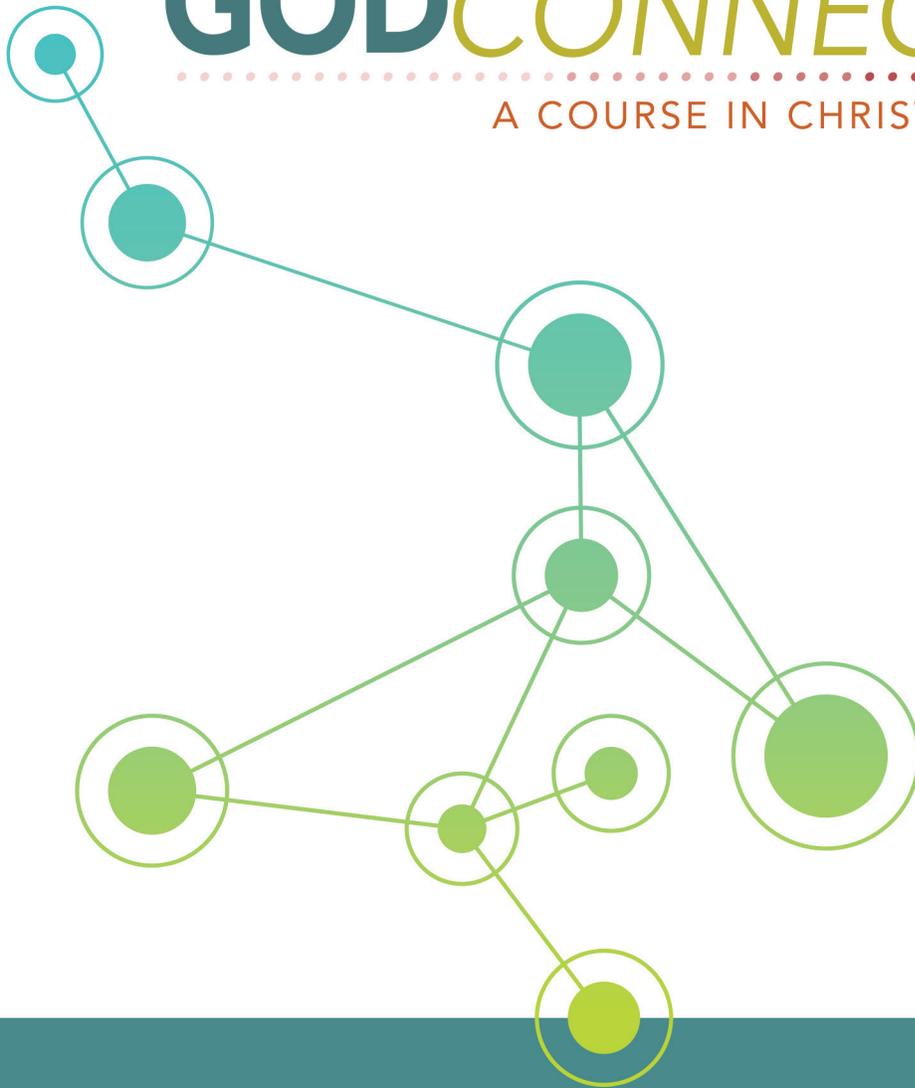


GODCONNECTS™

A COURSE IN CHRISTIANITY



LUTHERAN
HOUR
MINISTRIES

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

This is an interactive study guide. We designed it to be flexible so it will fit both group and personal use. It includes links, which provide extra information on Internet sites where you can browse and dig as deep as you want.

A PDF discussion guide containing all 12 sessions, as well as single session guides, are available at www.lhm.org/godconnects.

To find the discussion guide on the DVD, load it into your computer (not your DVD player). You can right click the menu. Push "Open" instead of "Play" and you will pull up a list of files, which includes the discussion guide.



ABOUT US

God Connects is a ministry of Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM). As a Christian outreach ministry, LHM supports churches worldwide, producing Christian radio and TV programming for broadcast, Internet and print communications, dramas, music, and outreach materials—all designed to reach unchurched people in the United States and more than 30 countries around the world. Lutheran Hour Ministries' flagship program, **The Lutheran Hour**, airs weekly on more than 1,400 stations and the American Forces Network. To learn more about this long-running Gospel program and LHM's other ministry resources, go to www.lhm.org.

CONTACT US

We would love to connect to you. Call us at **1-855-JOHN316 (1-855-564-6316)** E-mail to lhmresponse@lhm.org.

INTRODUCTION

GodConnects: In a difficult and confusing world, God is connecting to you!

God, are You there?

Everyone, at some point, asks this question. It can come at moments of sterile reflection or in times of deep despair. "God, if You are there, why don't You show Yourself to me?" In this confusing world where authenticity is so elusive, it seems like we cannot connect to God.

We could not connect to God, but the good news is that God connects with us. He has been doing this from the beginning in amazing ways. The most direct way God connected to us is when He became one of us in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was on this earth, He was the very revelation of God as He taught and healed and loved.

Then to restore our connection to God which had been shattered because of sin, on the cross, Jesus willingly paid the penalty for our sins—in His own death! This is the most authentic, startling and determined love the world could have ever imagined.

Now God connects to us by revealing Himself in the Bible. This God-given book has an amazing story. It tells of God's constant and compassionate work to restore our relationship with Him.

GodConnects wants to share that story with you. *GodConnects* is a course that tells this unique, unequalled story. Whether you do not believe in Christ as Savior or want to deepen your faith in Him, as you delve into *GodConnects* you will explore what the Bible says about this remarkably loving God, and how this love gives direction and meaning to your life today and forever.

On this website, you can explore these questions of faith. You will find videos and other up-to-date media that take advantage of today's technology.

So let's get started

WHY JESUS?

Session 1: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Lord God, there are a lot of ideas floating around about who You are and what we have to do to be right with You. Lead me to Your truth. I pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Normally, life is pretty routine and ordinary. Distractions, aggravations and problems come along, but most times we can handle them on our own. But every so often we come across a problem too big to handle by ourselves. Questions arise. How do we fit into the universe? What does eternity look like for me?

We all get very busy with our lives. Still, in the back of our minds, when this life is over we want to know what happens in the next life—if *there is one!* On their own, people have come up with two basic ways to deal with their eternal fate: they either deny there is life after death, or they do their best to earn it on their own.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- List some life events you find too big to handle by yourself.
- Which of these events could you handle with some earthly help, and which are too big even for earthly help?

1.1. HOW DO PEOPLE DENY THE REALITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF LIFE AFTER DEATH?

One solution is to deny the issue's significance. We are told death is a natural part of life, and we should embrace it. When we draw our last breath we will cease to exist. That's it. But at least we can take comfort knowing the cycle of life continues after us.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What aspects of this idea could people find appealing?
- What is unsatisfying about it?

1.2. HOW DO SOME MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF LIFE AFTER DEATH?

Practically all faiths believe something awaits us on the other side of this life. Here are examples from three major world religions:

ISLAM - For Muslims, the purpose of life is to live in a way that pleases Allah—the Arabic word for God. This is done so they may gain paradise. In the end, a person's eternal fate is determined according to an accounting of his or his good deeds outweighing the bad. The name of this religion is rooted in the word "aslama" which means submission. The prophet Muhammad taught that peace can be achieved by submitting one's life to Allah. Muhammad (born in 570 A.D.) started the religion when he was angered by idolatry and immorality in Arabia. Using his foundational phrase, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet," he waged "holy war," conquering most of Arabia, and purging it of other deities.

Islam's holy book, The Qur'an, contains Muhammad's teachings. It was written by Muhammad's followers after his death. The Qur'an elevates Muhammad, and it claims Jesus was his forerunner. It portrays Allah as a deity high above and detached from his material creation. The five pillars of Islam are the following:

- The Creed: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet";
- Prayer, to be performed five times each day at appointed times;
- Almsgiving—2 ½ percent of all personal possessions;
- Fasting during Ramadan;
- Pilgrimage to Mecca.

These are the five mandatory practices of the Muslim life. Islam claims Allah is a God of reward and punishment, asserting that it is foolish to believe in a God of love or grace like Christians do.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What is the appeal of Islam's insistence on moral living?
- Consider Islam's five pillars. How hard would it be for a Muslim to accomplish these each day?
- What evil human behaviors can a Muslim do without fear of divine punishment if he is doing them for "Allah's glory"?

DIGGING DEEPER

To learn more about Islam, take a look at *The Challenge of Islam* from the **Men's NetWork**.

- Part 1 <http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=11684>
- Part 2 <http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=12218>

HINDUISM - This is the world's third largest religion after Christianity and Islam. Hinduism teaches that the soul never dies, but is reborn in human or animal form each time the body dies. This cycle of death and rebirth is called reincarnation. Hindus may expect up to 10,000 reincarnations before spiritual perfection is attained. Hinduism grew out of the tribal cultures of India. It has many practices, philosophies and laws and does not have a single God. Hinduism believes when a person worships any god that praise is being received by the supreme God named Brahman. Deities are present in sculpted images; therefore, food and physical care is offered to these idols. You've probably heard of "karma" before. This rule states that our good and bad actions have consequences in this life and the next, affecting how our soul will be reborn at our next reincarnation. Once spiritual perfection is attained, the soul is united with the Supreme Being in total enlightenment and peace. Getting multiple chances at earthly life may sound wonderful at first, but Hindus see the downside of living in this ruined world. The goal of their faith is to live a life so exemplary you finally break free from the cycle of repeated reincarnations and become united with the Supreme Being forever.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What appeal does reincarnation offer someone who is contemplating their own death?
- What would be the downside if we found ourselves reincarnated into this world over and over again?
- What is attractive about being united with the Supreme Being?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "The Quest for Experiencing the Divine: The Rise and Effect of Eastern Religions"
<http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/TheQuestforExperiencingtheDivingMasaki.pdf>

BUDDHISM - The focus in Buddhism is not about a relationship with a God; instead, it's about achieving freedom by totally letting go of all feelings and passions. That freedom is known as Nirvana. Zen is Japanese Buddhism. "Buddha" means "awakened one." Have you seen a statue of a heavy-set Buddha with a peaceful, satisfied look on his face? You are looking at Buddhism's founder, Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhism teaches an eight-fold path to this freedom: Right understanding, Right-directed thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration. Does that sound like a lot of things to keep right?

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe some of the strong feelings and passions that fill our lives with too much drama.
- Why would some people be drawn to the peace and freedom Buddhism features?
- What would be the downside of an eternity cut off from emotion and passion?

1.3. IS THE BAR SET TOO LOW?

One common trend in all religions, except Christianity, is the requirement of personal achievement—we must do something to reach perfect peace or attain God's favor. But this has some major problems. How do I know when I have been good enough? Since I am imperfect, why must the holy, sinless God lower His standards to accept the imperfect and sinful behavior of His followers? Let's read what the Bible says.

For You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all evildoers. (Psalm 5:4-5)

Whoever keeps the whole Law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. (James 2:10)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- According to the Bible, how far has God lowered the bar regarding what we must do if we are to earn our way to heaven?

1.4. WHAT ARE WE REALLY CAPABLE OF??

All religions, except Christianity, are based on humans accomplishing some requirement of God. However, the Bible tells us the truth about human capabilities in the third chapter of Romans.

As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Now we know that whatever the Law says it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the Law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:10-20)

Human beings are capable of doing things that seem wonderful and noble to us, but it is God alone who is perfectly holy and just. His absolute purity demands our absolutely purity if we are to live with Him in paradise after this life. Each of us is weighed down by sins that deserve God’s punishment.

1.5. WHAT IS GOD WILLING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Well, *everything!* Knowing we are powerless to save ourselves. He sent His Son Jesus to do something completely revolutionary. God’s eternal Son took our human nature upon Himself and—as our Substitute—kept God’s Law perfectly throughout His life. Then He made a great exchange by giving us His perfect life of obedience and taking from us every sin and failure. He carried them to the cross where He suffered their consequences in our place.

For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:21-24)

When Jesus rose from the dead after His death on the cross, He defeated death—the enemy we could never conquer—so that we could receive the gift of eternal life. Jesus said,

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. (John 11:25b–26a)

While every other world religion, ideology and philosophy requires God lower His standards so people can measure up to go to heaven, Christianity maintains God’s perfect standards. It does this while offering a perfect Savior who rescued humanity from brokenness, pain, imperfection, failure and sin.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does it change your thoughts about God when you realize He kept the bar high on His perfect moral standards and still provided a way for us to be saved by what Jesus did on the cross for you?
- What does it mean to you to realize you don’t have to do anything to win God’s approval—that Jesus Christ your Savior has done it all for you?

1.6. WHAT IS GOD'S ULTIMATE PLAN?

We could not connect to God, but the good news is that God connects with us. He has been doing this from the beginning in amazing ways. To restore our connection to God which had been shattered because of sin, on the cross Jesus willingly pays the penalty for our sin—with His own death! This is the most authentic, startling and reckless love that could ever be imagined.

Compare the eternal life in paradise Jesus promises to the highest aspirations of other religions. We will live in perfect peace and harmony with all, while still enjoying the emotions and holy passions God created us to enjoy. We will live in a perfectly moral world where everyone loves and cares for one another. But, best of all, we will be forever connected to our God, without having to live thousands of lives to get there.

DIGGING DEEPER

- *How Can God Forgive Me?*, audio: (<http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8113PD.mp3>)
- *Reasons to Believe*, booklet: (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#1.6>)
- *Forgiveness is a Choice*, booklet: (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#1.6>)

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for being holy and perfect and providing a way through Your Son Jesus for me to be perfect too. Forgive me all my wrongs and give me peace now and always. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

WHY THE BIBLE?

Session 2: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Lord God, the Christian church has long taught the Holy Bible is Your Word to us. Even so, many voices claim it's full of errors and contradictions. Teach me how to think of the Bible so I may know where to find Your truth. I pray this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Every religion has its holy writings: Jews have the Torah; Muslims the Qur'an; Buddhists the Tripitaka, and Hindus the Rigveda. The Christian church has long held the Holy Bible to be its holy writing. But is the Bible really God's Word?

2.1. WHY IS IT CALLED THE BIBLE?

The word "Bible" comes from a Greek word meaning book. Thinking of the Bible as one big book is helpful in reminding us it ultimately has one Writer—God Himself. But it's also called the "Holy Scriptures" to remind us the Bible is actually a collection of texts—God used more than 40 people spanning 1,500 years to produce this remarkable book.

2.2 WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE BIBLE? ISN'T IT JUST AN ORDINARY BOOK?

There are many great books written by wise men and women. But of all the books in the world the Holy Bible is unique. It identifies itself as God's own Word, His message for all people, for all time.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

2.3. WHY DID GOD USE HUMAN WRITERS?

God could have given us His Word directly, or through an angel. But instead He speaks to us through human writers. He gave them the thoughts they expressed and every single word they wrote. Through these widely varied writers over many centuries God was at work revealing and preserving His Word throughout the centuries.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does it affect your view of the Bible when you realize God used human writers instead of angels?

2.4. AREN'T THERE MISTAKES AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE?

With so many different human writers over such a long span of time, shouldn't we expect the Bible to be filled with contradictions? Many people make that assumption, but they need to look a little closer. The accuracy of the Bible depends on how closely God oversaw its writing. Consider what Peter says about God's role in guiding the writers of the Bible:

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

God directed the choice of each and every word that was written. Though books from 40 different writers from different generations are found in the Bible, God was guiding what they wrote to ensure His Word would be free from error or contradiction.

It contains ancient expressions and Middle Eastern cultural descriptions, but it is God's Word of truth applying to every time and generation.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does God's direct involvement in carrying the writers along and giving them every word to write give the Bible more authority?

2.5. DO WE HAVE THE ORIGINAL WRITINGS?

The original writings (called "autographs") were handwritten on papyrus (plant stems smashed together and rolled up into scrolls) or on parchment or vellum (animal skins that were folded into a little booklet called a "codex"). Over time they were either lost or wore out, but other copies had been made. Some existing fragments of the New Testament were written just a few decades after the original, but the oldest copies of the Old Testament were written hundreds, even thousands of years after the original writings themselves.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why does this loss of the original documents cause some people to doubt the accuracy of the Bible we have today?

DIGGING DEEPER

- How papyrus is made, <http://youtu.be/mBnEMUvINvl>
- How vellum and parchment are made: <http://youtu.be/O2BWc1N9Cqo>

2.6. HOW RELIABLE ARE THE COPIES OF THESE ORIGINAL WRITINGS?

The church approached the making of copies of the Bible with great care. The copyists were called "sopherim," a Hebrew word meaning counters. To double check each copy they counted each word and letter comparing it to a master list for what belonged on each page to ensure accuracy.

For many years, the oldest handwritten copy of the Old Testament we had was the Masoretic Text. It dates from 1006 A.D. In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, including multiple copies of almost all the books of the Old Testament. These dated from around 200 years before Christ. Critics expected to find great discrepancies between the two texts because of the recopying that would have occurred over more than 1,000 years. However, there was remarkable agreement between the texts. In fact, any differences that did exist involved only minor, unimportant matters like the spelling of a name, or differing numbers.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What personal or family documents would you take great care to preserve?
- How would counting letters and words or finding the center word on any page help a copyist ensure the accuracy of his work?

2.7. CAN WE FIND ANY DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE BIBLE'S DIVINE ORIGIN?

If the Bible was written by people without God's help, it could only record events they experienced in their lifetimes. It could never accurately predict or prophecy events that would occur hundreds of years after their deaths. But the Bible has hundreds of prophecies fulfilled long after the death of the writers.

For instance, in Isaiah's writings we find a vivid description of Jesus' sufferings, death and resurrection. It was written about 700 years before those events took place.

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the Righteous One, My Servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:3-11).

The verse you just read is only one example of hundreds of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The following are other prophecies uttered hundreds of years before Jesus walked the earth:

JESUS' BIRTH

Jesus born of the Virgin Mary: *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel.* (Isaiah 7:14)

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, descended from David's family: *Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.* (Jeremiah 23:5)

Jesus born in the town of Bethlehem: *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me One who is to be Ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.* (Micah 5:2)

JESUS' LIFE AND MINISTRY

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey the week of His crucifixion: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* (Zechariah 9:9)

JESUS' SUFFERING AND DEATH

The Crucifixion: *For dogs encompass Me; a company of evildoers encircles Me; they have pierced My hands and feet—I can count all My bones—they stare and gloat over Me; they divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.* (Psalm 22:16-18)

Drinking the wine-vinegar from a sponge after He cried out "I thirst" in the cross:

They gave Me poison for food, and for My thirst they gave Me sour wine to drink. (Psalm 69:21)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why should the fulfillment of prophecies hundreds of years after their prediction strengthen the Bible's claim to be God's Word?
- If God had not inspired the writers, what are the odds they could have accurately predicted so many details about Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection?

2.8. WHAT IS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

You will hear a variety of answers to this question:

- "It tells the history of God's people."
- "It teaches God's ways."
- "It shows right and wrong."
- "It tells about the life of Jesus."

The Bible is all about God’s plan to send His Son Jesus to save us. John 20:30-31 says it simply and well:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.

He [Jesus] said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (Luke 24:25–27)

Then He [Jesus] said to them, “These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44–45)

2.9. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS?

Both the Old and New Testaments tell about Jesus Christ and His rescue mission. The Old Testament was written before Jesus’ birth. It promises His coming and makes many predictions about His life. The New Testament tells of the Savior who came and details how He rescued us.



2.10. WHAT SHOULD I THINK WHEN THINGS IN THE BIBLE MAKE NO SENSE TO ME?

It is important to use the rules of grammar and language to understand the Scriptures. That being said, some things in the Bible still won’t fit our understanding or experience of life in this world. In these cases we have to let God be God, remembering He has the power to do more than human reason can imagine.

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What Bible teachings do you struggle with?

2.11. WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR WHEN I READ THE BIBLE?

The Bible's two primary messages are Law and Gospel.

The Law, God's rules of right and wrong, shows us the reason we needed Jesus to come to save us. It commands and teaches us how to live lives pleasing to God. Since we cannot live perfect lives, it reveals our sins—the ways we violate God's Law, and it shows the punishment we deserve for those sins.

For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23a)

The Gospel is the dominant message of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. It speaks of what God did for us to fix the problems our sin has caused. It shows us God's love and compassion in sending His Son Jesus to be our Savior. It unfolds God's plan of salvation for us—a plan created and put into action from the time humans rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. It tells of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Savior. It proclaims the forgiveness we receive as a gift from God. It declares God's promises of eternal life. It promises Jesus is coming again. It gives us hope as we journey through life this side of heaven.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do you think so many world religions are based on what we do for salvation, rather than what God has done for us?
- Why is it so difficult for us to open up and admit we cannot save ourselves from our sin?
- What freedom does it bring knowing Jesus Christ kept all the Law's demands, suffering for our sins and wrong-doings, when He died on the cross?

DIGGING DEEPER

- For a clear and comprehensive explanation of Law and Gospel, check out this book-sized collection of lectures delivered by C.F.W. Walther: <http://www.lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/walther/LG/>

2.12. IS THE BIBLE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND?

While some parts of the Bible are certainly challenging to understand, God made sure the message of the Bible is clear and comprehensible to all.

The unfolding of Your Words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. (Psalm 119:130)

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will." (Matthew 11:25-26)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- One of the most-loved verses in the Bible is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." What relation might the simple, understandable quality of this verse have with the deep love so many people have toward it?

2.13. WHICH IS THE BEST VERSION OF THE BIBLE FOR ME TO READ?

There are a number of different English translations or versions of the Bible: the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Version—to name a few. All these versions give the Law and Gospel we need to understand for our salvation. But some are stronger than others in certain respects.

DIGGING DEEPER

- The following articles can help guide you in searching for the best Bible for you to read.
- Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, wrote the following article, which suggests guidelines in choosing an understandable English Bible translation to use: “All Those Translations! How Are We to Decide which English Translation of the Bible to Use?” <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=518>
- Some Christians believe the King James Version is the best and most accurate translation, maintaining that all others have been corrupted by heretical manuscripts. In his article “Is Your Modern Translation Corrupt?” James R. White helps readers understand the process of building an English translation from thousands of manuscript copies: <http://www.equip.org/articles/is-your-modern-translation-corrupt/>
- Today some people question referencing God as “male” as well as other uses of masculine pronouns and word forms like “man” in the sense of “mankind.” The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod prepared the report “Biblical Revelation and Inclusive Language” to address these concerns: <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=314>

2.14. HOW CAN I START READING THE BIBLE?

There is no doubt that God preserved His Word through centuries of copying for an amazing purpose! He wants you to know Him through it! If you’re interested in reading the Bible, consider this approach:

1. Start with one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John). There you’ll learn about Jesus’ life.
2. Then read Galatians through Colossians. These are short letters to Christians full of great teachings for faith and daily life.
3. Next, go back to Acts. Here you’ll read the story of how Christianity began.
4. Now read Genesis. As the first book of the Bible, it has key teachings about life and gives a big-picture perspective of God’s work.
5. Then read Romans in the New Testament.
6. After that, keep going with the books of your choice. Be ready for an adventure and for blessing!

2.15. WHAT ARE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE BIBLE?

To read the Bible online or to do detailed searches, go to <http://www.biblegateway.com/>
How We Got the Bible - video Bible study: <http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=12754>
The Bible on Trial: Beyond a Reasonable Doubt: <http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=16902>
The Bible—What? Where? Why? booklet: <http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#2.15>

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Word in the Holy Bible. Strengthen my confidence in that perfect revelation, so I may always put my faith in Jesus Christ my Savior. I pray in His Name. Amen.

Opening Prayer: Lord God, this world often seems very cold and uncaring. I confess that sometimes I have been a part of making it that way. Teach me how You would have me honor You and treat those around me, that I may truly love You with all my heart and love my neighbor as myself. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

3.1. SO WHAT ARE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

The Ten Commandments are the Law of God that expresses His will for us. He gave it to the Israelites shortly after He freed them from slavery in Egypt. They camped around Mount Sinai and God came down with powerful signs which showed the Israelites how serious He was about the Law He was about to give them.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered in thunder. (Exodus 19:16-19)

There at Mount Sinai God's voice thundered the words of the Ten Commandments to the nation of Israel. They were so terrified by the thundering voice of God they begged Moses to speak to them on God's behalf. So God called Moses up to the mountain top and there wrote these Ten Commandments on two stone tablets, so Moses could carry them back to the people.

Jesus spoke about these commandments and showed God hasn't changed His mind about them:

(Jesus said) "Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:19-20)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why did God make the scene at Mount Sinai so grand and terrifying when He gave His Ten Commandments to His people?
- How can remembering this context help us to see God's commandments as a matter of eternal life and eternal death?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Read the pamphlet "The Ten Commandments" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1083>) for a brief explanation of each.
- The Bible tells us God gave us the Ten Commandments, but never identifies which is which. Historians and theologians from Judaism and Christianity have come up with two different ways to number them. This link provides [Augustine's Order](http://www.bible-researcher.com/decalogue.html) (<http://www.bible-researcher.com/decalogue.html>), which is followed by the Lutheran and Catholic Churches and others.

3.2. HOW DID JESUS SUMMARIZE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

Once Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest in the Old Testament. He summed up the Ten Commandments in two commands—one directed toward God, the other toward our neighbor.

And He (Jesus) said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

All the commandments come down to our love for God and for one another. Or as Romans 13:10b puts it, “Love is the fulfillment of the Law.” When we love God before all things, we keep Him in the proper place in our lives. When we truly love the people around us, we protect their lives, reputation and property, and in so doing find greater satisfaction and joy in our life.

In 1 John 4:8b we read, “God is love.” Out of His great love for us He gives us life, provides for that life, and protects it from all who would bring death or harm to us. Out of that great love He also gave His Son to save us from sin, death and eternal punishment. By giving us His Ten Commandments, God is simply commanding us to love Him and one another as He has first loved us.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- When you treat another person with unexpected love and kindness, what difference does that make in your own life and outlook?
- Discuss what differences we would see in our families, workplaces, communities, nation and world if we truly loved each other as much as we loved ourselves.

3.3. Does God intend His Ten Commandments to apply to us today?

Absolutely! It wouldn't make much sense for Jesus to summarize the laws into two broad statements if He intended to abolish them. The Ten Commandments continue to provide modern society with the blueprint for living an ordered, meaningful life, which promotes peace with others and shows how we honor God.

Some might counter this point by saying the Ten Commandments are badly outdated. They were given some 2,500 years ago and don't address modern issues. For instance, how can it help direct our use of the Internet? At first glance, they seem to have a point; life has certainly changed a great deal between now and the day Moses received those tablets. The methods of delivery may have changed, but the human nature that tempts us to make sinful choices remains fully intact.

(Jesus said) “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18)

DIGGING DEEPER

- “God's Standards” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7847PD.mp3>) shows the importance of upholding God's Law today.

3.4. CAN WE EARN OUR SALVATION THROUGH FOLLOWING THE LAW?

Sure—if we can keep each of God's commandments perfectly, never violating a single law during our entire life. Our big problem is that none of us is perfect, for all of us sin. So, no, sinners can't earn salvation through following the Law.

They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:3)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- In session one “Why Jesus?” we discussed other world religions which lower the bar and supposedly let you earn your way to heaven. In Islam you will earn heaven as long as your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds. In Hinduism you get reincarnated and have an infinite number of do-overs, until you finally get it right and earn your way to Nirvana.
- What makes these alternatives more attractive to people than Christianity?
- How do these religions do away with the need for Jesus Christ as our Savior?
- What is the danger in judging our lives by people around us instead of judging them according to God's Law?

3.5. WHAT IS ORIGINAL SIN?

The trouble is our sinful condition goes far deeper than the evil deeds we do and the good things we leave undone. Our entire being was contaminated with sin from the moment we are conceived—long before we could do any good or evil deeds. The Bible calls this original sin. Original sin is the sinful nature we received from our sinful parents.

It all started back in Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate the forbidden fruit their nature was changed. The holy image of God which had been created in them was replaced with a sinful nature. They passed that sinful nature on to their children at conception, who passed it down to theirs, eventually passing it on to our parents, who passed it on to us. That is how original sin continues to be passed throughout the entire human race from generation to generation.

(Jesus said) "Why do you not understand what I say to you? It is because you cannot bear to hear My Word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer in the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:43-44)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it hard to accept that newborn babies (and even babies in the womb) are sinners who need God's forgiveness?
- When we think of sin why do we tend to focus on the bad things we have done and said, more than the thoughts and desires of our minds and hearts?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Why are We Punished for the Sin of Adam and Eve?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7406PD.mp3>)

3.6. HOW STRICT IS GOD ABOUT OUR OBEDIENCE TO HIS LAW?

God's holiness (that is, His absolute sinLESSness) and justice demand us to be absolutely perfect in all our thoughts, desires, words and deeds.

(Jesus said) "You therefore must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:28)

The Bible clearly teaches that every sin and disobedience must be punished.

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (Hebrews 10:28)

Why so strict? God is absolutely holy and perfectly just. Why doesn't He strike us down instantly? He doesn't because He is merciful and wants to forgive our sins. But even though He is patient, He cannot tolerate sin in His presence forever.

For You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. (Psalm 5:4-6)

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. (Psalm 2:10-12)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- The US was outraged when a teenager who killed four people in a drunk driving accident did not receive jail time from the judge, due to the so-called *Affluenza Defense* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoY1ARr7dp4>). The judge was fired. Why would we not expect God, as the perfect judge not to justly punish sin?
- What must you first acknowledge about yourself before you can believe that God really does have this reaction to your sins?

3.7. If we cannot save ourselves, how can we be saved?

Like a condemned criminal there is nothing we can do to earn His favor or turn away His wrath. But God's love and mercy for us moved Him to provide a Substitute. Jesus became human to take our sins upon Himself, and He received the full punishment for those sins in His suffering and death on the cross. Watching the brutality Jesus suffered in movies like *The Passion of the Christ* helps us realize how serious God is about His Law and holiness. But it also reminds us that God completely satisfied His holiness and justice by laying our sins on Jesus, who paid for each one in full.

For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." (Galatians 3:13)

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does watering down God's laws or taking credit for our good works make the atoning sacrifice of Jesus unnecessary?

3.8. What purposes does God's Law serve?

God's Law works in three different ways:

1. Curb - it controls violent outbursts of sin in society. The Law works to keep order in our lives, families, communities and the nations of the world. God works through the Law to curb our sinful desires, and protects our lives and possessions. You can think of this first use of the Law as a fence. While some look at it as a boundary that restricts, it is really a barrier designed to protect us from danger.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for He is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1-4)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Discuss what happens when the fence of God's Law is removed. Describe the horrible things people do after disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes and blackouts.
- What would life be like without law enforcement?

2. Mirror – The Law's second and most important purpose is to reveal our sinfulness so that we realize our need to seek forgiveness. Here it acts like a mirror. Mirrors show us when our hair is out of place, when we have food in our teeth, when our clothes are not buttoned, zipped or fastened correctly. In the same way the Law shows how far we have strayed from God's perfect path. It removes all excuses, convinces us we deserve eternal punishment for our sins, and shows why we need Jesus Christ as our Savior.

If it had not been for the Law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." (Romans 7:7b)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Many people set the bar for their behavior only slightly better than the people around them. Why is that still not good enough for God?
- Why is it so hard to confess our sins and admit we need a Savior?

3. Guide – It acts like a rule or guide to direct our decisions in life in a God-pleasing way. Once we have confessed our sins and received God’s forgiveness for Jesus’ sake, God’s Law serves a third purpose for us. We need this because our sinful desires still mislead us even with God’s forgiveness. The Law steps in to reveal the trap of sin and make the right path clear to us.

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe some things that seem good and right or, at least, harmless, until the Bible shows us they are wrong and harmful for us.

3.9. What are the Ten Commandments?

First: You shall have no other gods.

Second: You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God.

Third: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Fourth: Honor your father and your mother.

Fifth: You shall not murder.

Sixth: You shall not commit adultery.

Seventh: You shall not steal.

Eighth: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Ninth: You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

Tenth: You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

3.10. First Commandment: You shall have no other gods.

In this commandment God requires us to put Him first in our lives. We must love Him above all things, shun doing anything to displease Him, and trust Him more than we trust in anyone or anything else in our lives.

At first glance this doesn’t seem too difficult. Who bows down to idols today? But stop and think what a god really is. It is any object you trust to provide your needs and deliver you from troubles. It is something you love and fear to lose.

This is probably clearest to see in addictions. An addict is willing to lose family, job, home, money, health, even life itself to get that next high. Clearly, that person has set their addiction—whether it be a drug, alcohol, Internet pornography, or some other activity—far above God.

But addiction isn’t the only way we violate the First Commandment. We easily slip from enjoying something to making it the most important part of our lives. People get consumed with their jobs, travel, sports, reading, or other enjoyable hobbies. Others place people ahead of God when they start dating, getting married, or raising children. Wealth, fame, political gain, popularity—whatever the distraction—this commandment reminds us of the importance of keeping God at the fore.

The First Commandment is critical for everyone because God alone is the Source of our life. He alone can provide all our needs, protect us from all harm, and deliver us from death and hell. It’s not really a selfish ego thing with God either, like He always insists on being in first place. It’s because you and I too easily forget how much we need God above all people and things in our life.

Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:25-26)

Once we see God for who He really is, when we experience His love in Jesus Christ and the joy that comes from committing our lives to Him, we won’t be so easily persuaded to make worldly things our greatest passions. In fact, we can more thoroughly enjoy the good things God gives us here on earth when we give Him credit and thanks for providing them to us.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What object would it be easiest for you to become obsessed with?
- What steps can you take to control that obsession and keep it in its rightful place?
- What things are important enough to make you willing to set aside regular time with God in worship, Bible reading, prayer, or private devotions?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “How Do I Keep Sports from Becoming My Religion” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8044PD.mp3>) helps one keep a healthy perspective.

3.11. SECOND COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT MISUSE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD.

In this commandment we are required to think highly of God and be careful only to speak about Him and use His Name in ways that will lead others to trust in Him as well.

The clearest way we can know about God is by what He has chosen to reveal in the Bible. We call this a self-revelation of God’s Name or reputation.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:21)

Since we love God our Father for saving us, and fear displeasing Him we are extremely careful in how we think and speak of His Name. We don’t want to think or speak of God like an old grandfather always laughing at his grandchildren and not really caring what we say and do. On the other hand, we want to avoid focusing too much on God’s justice and holiness and forgetting His love. Without God’s love and forgiveness we cannot help but be filled with guilt and despair since nothing we do is ever perfect enough.

God’s Name is above all others in heaven and on earth, as there is power in the Name of the Lord. God wants us and all people to call upon Him, to know we are His children for Jesus’ sake, and to be confident He is always available to us through prayer by simply calling upon His Name.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. (Psalm 50:15)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How do we affect God’s reputation in the minds of others when they see us regularly committing little sins (or bigger ones)?

3.12. THIRD COMMANDMENT: REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY BY KEEPING IT HOLY.

In this commandment God calls us to set aside time each week to gather with fellow believers in worship and to hear His Word in worship. From this we receive great blessings from Him. In the process He puts our lives back in balance by reminding us of our purpose on earth and the life to come.

And on the seventh day God finished His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation. (Genesis 2:2-3)

God didn’t rest because He was worn out or exhausted. He was setting a pattern of work and rest for His human creatures to imitate. He created us with a need for rest and refreshing even before our first parents fell into sin. But now that our human nature has been impaired by sin we need that rest even more.

God’s command to dedicate time to worship and rest is more important to us now than ever before. Modern society, with its smartphones, tablets and instant, worldwide access to just about anything keeps us going at a pace never seen before. But even more, it focuses us on the here and now, and leads us to lose perspective on the bigger, far more important matters of life like where we will spend eternity when this brief life is over.

God gives us a tremendous privilege when He invites us to sit at His feet as His own dear children. There we are reassured of His love and forgiveness, being fed and strengthened for the days ahead. Yet how easily we excuse ourselves from worship, or allow ourselves to be distracted by small and unimportant matters.

(Jesus said) "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Weekly worship affords us the opportunity to have fellowship with other believers, to grow in our faith and to pray together.

Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- "Why Should I Go to Church" (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.12>) is a booklet that wrestles with common objections about going to church.
- How can weekly worship help you reset priorities to get more out of life and give more of yourself to the people most important to you?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Why Do We Worship on Sunday?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7435PD.mp3>)

3.13. FOURTH COMMANDMENT: HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.

In this commandment God reminds us He has appointed our parents and other authorities to protect and provide for us as His representatives. He commands us to honor and obey them so long as they do not command us to do things contrary to His will.

Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13:2)

God is the ultimate authority in our lives and in all of creation. Yet when creating this world God made mankind in "His image," delegating people to represent Him in roles of authority.

Those representatives became even more important after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit because mankind abandoned God's high standards of love and care for one another, as each of us seeks out our own pleasure and benefit.

Parents aren't the only authorities God places over us. Beyond them He also gives us grandparents, mentors, teachers, pastors, bosses and supervisors, police officers, government officials, and other authorities who care for us and are deserving of our honor.

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Romans 13:7)

There is one case where God requires us to disobey parents or other authorities, and that is when they want us to disobey Him. If they want us to disobey God they are certainly no longer acting as His representatives.

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What was the best advice you got from parents or other authorities that you now regret not following?
- Describe how your boss or supervisor serves as God's representative to you and your family.
- How can you still honor government officials when you strenuously disagree with them?
- Discuss why "God Allows Bad Rulers to Gain Power." (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7544PD.mp3>)

DIGGING DEEPER

- "What is My Obligation to the Government?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8032PD.mp3>)
- "Civil Disobedience" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7738PD.mp3>) is disobeying authorities for conscience sake. Is that okay?

- *The Intersection of Church and State* (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=21040>) is a video that explores how the church and government properly work together.

3.14. Fifth Commandment: You shall not murder.

This commandment not only forbids the taking of human life, but it also requires us to protect the lives of other people, especially those who cannot protect themselves. We are forbidden to harm anyone in any way, even from holding grudges in our hearts. Since the Fifth Commandment prohibits us from killing other people (murder), it seems like the easiest of the commandments to keep. However, the following examples show how challenging this can be.

1. Suicide - God forbids suicide. Being the Author and Giver of life, He alone has the right to end your life or that of anyone else. Self-murder is an expression of doubt in His almighty power to forgive us, or to transform and improve our lives.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- List the various reasons people commit suicide.
- Discuss how God is the answer to each of these decisions.

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Suicide" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7921PD.mp3>) discusses difficult questions regarding this issue.
- *Surviving a Loved One's Suicide* (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>) is a booklet giving hope and perspective to survivors.

2. Euthanasia - Likewise, God never gave us authority to put people "out of their misery," in order to relieve their suffering, or to ease the burden of the care of those who are seriously ill. God in His wisdom and mercy knows the right time to end people's lives. He alone retains that authority. However, when it is evident that a person is in the process of dying, it can be permissible to stop heroic medical intervention.

DIGGING DEEPER

- *Speaking of Care* (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>) examines issues related to the caregiver.
- Click [here](http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=861) (www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=861) for list of articles on euthanasia.

3. Abortion: The Bible makes clear that each of us is a valuable person from the moment of our conception. Except to save the life of the mother, abortion is a violation of God's commandment forbidding murder.

For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:13-16)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do we take such heroic efforts to save a prematurely born infant, then turn around and abort a perfectly healthy unborn child?
- What help can we offer to women who are considering abortion?

DIGGING DEEPER

- A premature baby's *fight for life* (<http://vimeo.com/78393869>)
- "Abortion" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1101>) is a pamphlet that discusses facets of this controversial issue.
- Click [here](http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=849) (<http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=849>) for a list of articles on abortion.

4. Hatred and anger - Jesus explains in the following passage that hatred and anger also break this commandment. God judges not just our actions, but also our words, thoughts and desires. You and I may never have caused someone's death by intention or accident, but which of us has not been angry at another, or insulted him, or refused to forgive? What about abuse, prejudice, bigotry and hatred?

(Jesus said) "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21-22)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe the various ways a person could harm his or her enemy without taking their lives.
- *There's More to Anger than Getting Mad* (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>) is a booklet that gives new ways of thinking about anger.

There are times when God permits the taking of a human life. If we are defending an innocent person or ourselves from a lawbreaker, God permits the use of force, even lethal force, to curb the evil and protect the innocent. For the same reason, the government has the same authority to carry out capital punishment and wage wars for just causes.

If you do wrong, be afraid, for he [the governing authority] does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:4b)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- List some of the professions that fall under the principle above.
- What are some circumstances where you would have the right to use force to protect your family or your home?
- Where do you draw the line in what you should protect, and what is not worth risking a human life over?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Capital Punishment" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7846PD.mp3>)
- *Has God Abandoned Me?* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.14>)

Life is a gift from God. As we were created in the very image of God, we must consider our lives—and the lives of every other person—as precious and worth protecting. We should do all that we can to befriend our neighbor, offering help and support in every way we can.

3.15. SIXTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

In this commandment God addresses His good gift of sexuality. From the very beginning God created humans as sexual beings. However, He reserves sexual activity for husband and wife in a lifelong marriage alone. He forbids all other forms of sexual activity because of the harm they inevitably bring upon us.

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27)

The second chapter of Genesis specifies how He created the first two humans. He formed Adam from the ground (see Genesis 2:7). Then, taking one of Adam's ribs He formed Eve (see Genesis 2:21-23). He brought her to the man, united them in marriage, and said,

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

That is the template for all marriages—and for sexual activity that is healthy and beneficial to us in body, heart, mind and soul.

Within the bounds of marriage, sexual activity serves three beneficial purposes:

1) Marital sex unites husband and wife into one flesh, strengthening the bonds that hold that marriage together.

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:5)

2) Families are strengthened. God designed sex to be confined within marriage so children would only be conceived, born and raised in a stable, loving home with a father and mother together. Again that passage “the two become one flesh” comes into play, for these children are the fruit of that one flesh.

3) Marital sex provides the only healthy outlet for the powerful sex drive God created in mankind, so we would “be fruitful and multiply” (see Genesis 1:28).

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)

God created marriage to be the lifelong union of a husband and wife. But He doesn’t leave us to our own devices. He provides the love, forgiveness and strength for every marriage to last through all the changes and hardships of this sinful world.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What hardships have you seen God bring you through?
- How is our society redefining the family? How is it working?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Search “parent” for a list of **Project Connect** booklets (<http://www.lhm.org/projectconnect/booklets.asp>) on family life.
- *Fatherhood* (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=17978>) is a video-based study on the key role that fathers play in their families.
- *For Better, For Worse – Maintaining a Healthy Marriage* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)
- *Uncover the Lover Within – Rediscovering Intimacy in Your Marriage* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)
- *Gambling* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)

This commandment forbids common practices in our society.

1. Divorce - Since “the two become one flesh,” God never made divorce part of His plan for marriage. Divorce violently tears the united flesh of husband and wife apart, causing deep pain and physical, emotional, and mental harm to each. In the same way, it violently rips apart the fruit of that union, their children.

Each marriage is a model of the relationship God has with each believer. He forbids divorce except in two cases—adultery or desertion. In these two cases the sinning spouse has already broken the bonds of marriage (just as a person can turn away from God to go searching for an “affair” with another god as we mentioned in the First Commandment). Divorce also deeply negatively affects the children of the couple.

Of course, divorce is not the only reason children live with a single parent. Though God’s ideal is for each child to be raised with a mother and father, there are many reasons this doesn’t happen, including sexual activity outside of marriage, and the death of a parent. God assures us He most certainly offers His blessings of love, forgiveness and peace to children born to single mothers, or raised by single fathers.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What pain have you experienced or witnessed in children of divorce?
- What’s a good way to convince them they are not responsible, without downplaying the pain they are genuinely experiencing?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “Is Divorce a Sin” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7736PD.mp3>) examines God’s will, repentance and forgiveness!
- *Beyond Divorce* (booklet, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>)

2. Sexual activity outside marriage

When we step outside God’s design for sexuality through adultery, premarital sex, and pornography, we expose ourselves to unintended emotional and physical injury. This inevitably comes whenever we use something in ways the Designer never intended. This happens because the key biblical teaching of how “the two become one flesh” (see Genesis 2:24) is a fundamental part of every single sexual act—both within marriage and outside it.

Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written “The two will become one flesh.” (1 Corinthians 6:16)

Sexual sin causes harm far deeper than physical, mental, and emotional; it causes grave spiritual damage. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 we read, “He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him.” The Bible describes this as a marriage between God and believers: Christ being the Groom, and all His believers, the church, being His bride. Just as a man having an affair cuts himself off from his union with his wife, every time we sin we cut ourselves off from our union with God.

He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:17-18)

This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality: that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us to impurity but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

Sexual sins are no worse than others sins, but they are different because we commit them directly against our own bodies. Truly this is no “victimless” crime, and God holds us accountable for how we use or abuse this body He has given us.

Co-habitation or living together before marriage is extremely common in our culture. On the surface it makes a lot of sense. Reason says, “Wouldn’t a man and woman have a better chance of making their marriage last the rest of their life if they try it out first?”

This sounds good and fine, but one thing is missing. The philosophies that lie behind marriage and living together are complete opposites. The promise of marriage is that husband and wife will stay together no matter what happens (“for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health”). Co-habitation lacks this commitment completely (“We’ll stay together as long as we get along. But if we find we don’t we’ll go our separate ways.”) Instead of practicing for marriage, they are practicing for divorce.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Is there such a thing as recreational sex, or “sex with no strings attached,” that does not have negative consequences?
- List some of the reasons people give for co-habiting before marriage.
- How does this lack of commitment affect the children born in co-habitation?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “Live Together Before Marriage?” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7910PD.mp3>) speaks a powerful perspective on how strong relationships are built—God’s way.
- *Pornography and the Search for Intimacy* (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.15>) is a booklet that discusses this problem and God’s proper plan for sexuality.

3. Homosexuality - God's Word clearly reserves sexual relations for a man and a woman in marriage only.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves ... For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:24, 26-27)

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality ... will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10b)

Some argue that same sex attraction isn't a choice made, but a way that a person is born. So they argue we should accept the homosexual lifestyle as a godly alternative, and even approve of homosexual marriage.

Psalm 51:5 asserts, *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."* Everyone has been corrupted by sin from the moment of conception. Our sinful nature distorts and corrupts the human nature God made in His image when He first created Adam and Eve. Jesus described it in these words,

"What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person." (Matthew 15:18-20)

Just because we are born with certain sinful desires or proclivities does not make those desires permissible or acceptable to God.

Homosexual acts are no worse sins than others. But like all other sins it must be confessed. Then the sinner can find full and complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ his Lord and Savior who paid the price for that sin as well as every other sin. The homosexual desire may well remain until Jesus restores His perfect image within the person when He returns on Judgment Day. But God is there to strengthen the believer to resist those sinful desires and to abstain from acting on them.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What do you think about the argument that we should accept homosexuality when an individual claims, "But God made me this way"?
- How can we share God's warning against homosexual lifestyle with a gay friend or family member without driving him/her away?
- How can we show genuine love and concern for a friend engaged in the gay lifestyle without giving the impression God is okay with it and he/she doesn't need to repent?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Homosexuality" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1100>) is a pamphlet outlining God's will in this area and the church's response.

In summary, God doesn't want to hinder our enjoyment of sex. Instead, He provides the healthy boundary of holy marriage within which it will richly bless our lives—body, heart, mind, soul and spirit.

3.16 SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.

In this commandment God gives us the right to own property. He protects that property and forbids us from stealing anyone else's property in any way, even in a way that may seem right. He also commands us to help others keep and improve those things He has entrusted to them.

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:28)

This is another one of those commandments that seems pretty easy on the surface. After all, not many of us have broken into a house or robbed a bank. But before we dismiss this commandment with a pat on the back, we need to remember that there is much involved in keeping this commandment.

Sure, we should not steal money, cars or jewels, but we must also not steal from our employers through long lunch breaks, pilfering business supplies or copies, or intentionally wasting time on the job. We shouldn't steal from customers by short-changing them either.

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?" The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds." (Amos 8:4-7)

Not only are we forbidden to take the things God has entrusted to others, we are to use the gifts He has given us to provide for people in need. Throughout the Bible we are introduced to many wealthy people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, King David, and his son King Solomon. God gave these men an abundance of possessions. They did not hoard these things, but generously shared them with those in need.

When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth. (Job 29:11-17)

Even when struck with severe poverty, God often moves His people to great generosity:

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints. (2 Corinthians 8:1-4)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Give some examples of ways people "steal" from people in a way that is legal?
- Can gambling (<http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#3.16>) be a way to get our neighbor's possessions? Or at least try?
- Share some ideas about how we can use the good things God has given us to help others.
- Describe a time you have seen someone be generous during a time of suffering in their own life.

3.17. EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT GIVE FALSE TESTIMONY AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR.

In this commandment God forbids us to lie or gossip about our neighbor. Instead, He directs us to protect our neighbor's reputation and presume the best motives lie behind their actions.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (Ephesians 4:25)

This Eighth Commandment is all about protecting reputations. This commandment literally forbids us to be a false witness, that is, to lie when we are testifying in court. That hardly seems like something many people would do, but once again God is listing the worst offense to cover every lesser case of lying in our daily lives.

There are any number of reasons why we lie—some malicious, some with the best of intentions. On the malicious side are things like insults, slander and spreading gossip. Each of these seeks to accomplish one thing, the destruction of another person's reputation. Maybe we aren't out to ruin someone's reputation altogether; perhaps, we're out to enhance our own by comparison. But that doesn't change the fact that our words harmed someone else. Some lies are done with non-malicious intentions. These may be offered to cover up some wrong we have done, or to spare the feelings of our spouse or someone else. Sometimes silence is a better option.

Jesus gave us some direction when a fellow believer sins against us, *(Jesus said) "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."* (Matthew 18:15)

Here is the perfect opportunity for gossip, but Jesus commands silence. After all, that is what God does when we confess our sins to Him. He forgives them and never brings them to remembrance again. And since each of us stumbles and sins, wouldn't we want those we've sinned against to do the same: protect our reputation by remaining silent rather than going out and publicly exposing our faults through gossip? That's what Peter meant when he wrote,

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Imagine if our families, churches, workplaces and communities tried hard to protect each other's reputations.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Give some examples of little white lies you told that ended up making things worse.
- Why is truth always the best option? Describe a time you tried to do something nice for someone but ended up having your motives challenged or misjudged. (Please protect their reputation by leaving this person anonymous.)
- What difference would it make if you started thinking more positively about the people around you?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Gossip and the Eighth Commandment" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7443PD.mp3>)
- "Is It Sometimes Okay to Tell a Lie?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8038PD.mp3>)

3.18. NINTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS: YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE. YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WIFE, OR HIS MANSERVANT OR MAIDSERVANT, HIS OX OR DONKEY, OR ANYTHING THAT BELONGS TO YOUR NEIGHBOR.

In this commandment, God cuts through our words and actions to expose the sin lurking in our hearts and minds. He forbids us to covetously desire in our hearts those things He has given to others, and commands us to remain content with what He provides us.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. (1 Timothy 6:6)

Contentment transforms everything. Our neighbor can get that promotion or pull up in a fancy, new car. He or she might even leave on another exotic vacation, and we can praise God on their behalf.

When God is truly the center of our lives we can rest assured He will provide us with everything we need—and enough left over to help our neighbor in his or her need too.

"Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). What does it mean to covet? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it this way: "to desire (what belongs to another) inordinately or culpably." It's easy to look at the Ten Commandments on the surface only, thinking we have kept them if we never murdered anyone, slept with another person's wife or husband, stolen someone's property, or lied in court. But these final two commandments blow the lid off that assumption; they show God does not only judge and punish our outward words and our actions, but He delves deep into our very thoughts and desires as He searches our hearts, minds, the very depths of our soul. Nothing is hidden from God.

Suddenly a new light is shed on the previous commandments. We may not have taken someone's life, or even caused physical harm, but if we have made their life bitter or even wished they were hurt or dead, we are a murderer in God's eyes. We may never have had sex with someone else's spouse, but if we looked lustfully at another, we are an adulterer in God's eyes. We may never have stretched out our hand to take something that belongs to our neighbor, but if we deeply desire something they have, we are a thief in God's eyes.

So how does God help us battle the covetous desires of our sinful nature? He gives us contentment. When we are satisfied with the things He has provided in this life, we aren't bothered by the things He has chosen to give others.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What answer do these commandments give to the notion that God will accept people into heaven as long as they have tried their best and lived a pretty good life?
- How do you feel when your neighbor gets a promotion, drives a new car, or leaves on an exotic vacation?
- If we find ourselves feeling covetous, what are some things we can focus on instead?
- Why is it important to shift our attention from the gifts we have to the God who has given us those gifts?

Closing Prayer: Lord God, Your Ten Commandments set the pattern for a perfect world, but they also show how far from perfect I am. Thank You for giving Your Son Jesus to save me from my disobedience. Forgive me for Jesus' sake, and give me grace and strength to follow Your laws for the benefit of my neighbor and for Your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

NATURE OF GOD

Session 4: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Holy God, from Your Ten Commandments I know I'm a sinner who deserves Your eternal punishment. My only hope is that You are a merciful and loving God. I seek forgiveness in Jesus, and ask You to reveal Yourself to me. I pray this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

4.1. WHO IS GOD?

This question is one that has intrigued people for thousands of years. This is not surprising; after all, it's only natural we would be curious about our Creator. People have come up with numerous conceptions of who they think God is (or, in some cases, what they think God is). Some of these depictions show God as [powerful](#), [majestic](#), or even as a simple human in either a [white suit](#) or a flannel shirt. Of course, Hollywood's portrayals aren't the most accurate sources for learning about God, so maybe we should begin by looking elsewhere for our answers.

4.2. WHAT IS GOD?

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

A being that is purely spirit—such as God or His angels—does not have a physical, material body. He is imperceptible to our five senses.

However, the Bible also reveals many other attributes or characteristics of our God.

4.3. WHAT ARE THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD?

God is a spirit who has existed for all eternity. He is all-knowing (see [John 21:17](#)), all-powerful (see [Matthew 19:26](#)), and is present everywhere at all times (see [Jeremiah 23:24](#)). God is unchanging (see [James 1:17](#)), God is faithful (see [2 Timothy 2:13](#)). He is holy and without sin (see [Leviticus 19:2](#)), forgiving and merciful (see [Psalm 86:15](#)). His ways are perfect and just (see [Deuteronomy 32:4](#)), gracious, merciful and above all else, God is love (see [1 John 4:16](#)).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Which of these attributes are the most frightening or intimidating?
- Discuss the attributes you find most comforting.

4.4. HOW DO WE KNOW THAT GOD REALLY EXISTS?

God has chosen to reveal Himself to us both in the nature of the world He created, and in His special revelation, the Bible.

1.) The Bible tells us God wrote the requirements of His Law on our hearts.

They show that the work of the Law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them. (Romans 2:15)

Most nations never received the Ten Commandments, yet they enact laws reflecting them. Our sense of morality and our conscience reveal that our Creator is a moral Being who holds His creatures accountable for their lives. Though we are sinners, God does not want us to be unaware that the Day of Judgment is coming for all people living or dead.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How has your sensitivity to your conscience changed over your lifetime?

DIGGING DEEPER

- *Your Place in God's Plan*- booklet: (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#4.4>)

2.) A second way God reveals Himself to us is by creation itself

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

An author leaves elements of his personality in his characters. A photographer shares images of the world that reveals her perspective. Likewise, God's fingerprints can be seen throughout His creation.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Which things in nature show you God's fingerprints the most clearly?
- Since this creation is shattered by sin, it no longer gives a complete reflection of the God who created it. What things could give people the impression that God is cruel and vindictive?
- Why is it dangerous to judge our standing with God by the circumstances in our lives?

3.) God most clearly reveals Himself to us through the His Word in the Bible, particularly the Gospels of Jesus Christ.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Because of God's great love for us, He makes Himself known to us so we receive forgiveness of our sins, and give Him our heartfelt praise and worship. He has created us, and makes it possible for us to be able to grow in our faith until we are united with Him for eternity in Heaven. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What are some situations in life where it would be important to look outside our feelings and impressions and learn about God from His Bible?

4.5. WHAT IS THE TRINITY?

One of the most important things we should learn about God is that He is triune, meaning there are three separate and distinct Persons who make up our one and only God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

(Jesus said) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

The [Trinity](#) is a mystery no human can ever fully understand. We simply must confine ourselves to the things God has revealed about Himself in the Bible and live with those things that are unknowable. The Christian church spent centuries struggling to find the most biblically accurate way to speak about it. We call the three formulas they ultimately agreed upon the Creeds.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What are some ways you have heard people try to explain the Trinity?
- Why do these descriptions always fall short?

4.6. WHAT ARE THE CREEDS?

To help provide clarification and weed out errors within the church, the early church developed belief statements called, "creeds." Three creeds still in use by Christians today include the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. These creeds summarize who God is and what He has done for us through each of the Godhead's three Persons.

4.7. WHO ARE THE THREE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY?

1. The Father: In the Bible, God the Father is most readily connected to the work of creating the universe (see Genesis 1:1). Though God has set natural law in place to govern His creation, He is continually sustaining and caring for His creation.

These all look to You, to give them their food in due season. When You give it to them, they gather it up; when You open Your hand, they are filled with good things. When You hide Your face, they are dismayed; when You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When You send forth Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the ground. (Psalm 104:27-30)

2. Jesus Christ: God the Son, also known as [Jesus Christ](#), is our Savior. His perfect life, death and resurrection saved all people from their sins. He paid the price for our sins and saved the world from eternal separation from God.

And He (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:18-20)

3. Holy Spirit: Finally, God the [Holy Spirit](#) is active in our world today, making it possible for us to know God and to create and sustain our faith in Him. It is the Spirit of the Lord who performs the work of sanctification, which means to bless, or make holy.

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

A great demonstration of the existence of the Trinity comes in the account of [Jesus' Baptism](#).

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22)

In those verses, we see each of the three unique Persons of the Trinity in the same place at the same time.

4.8. DID GOD REALLY CREATE THE UNIVERSE IN SIX DAYS?

The Genesis 1 account of the creation of the heavens and the earth depicts God's actual methods and timeframe for creation. When God gave the Third Commandment on Mount Sinai, He reinforced the six-day creation.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:11)

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Out of Nothing" - (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=11634>)

4.9. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CREATE?

To create something means to bring into existence that which had not existed before. So when we say God created the universe, we are saying God made all things out of nothing but the spoken words of His mouth. There were no pre-existing materials used in the construction of the universe; instead, He created both the object and also the materials from which the object was made. This is significant because it makes God the one and only Creator, solely responsible for the artistry and craftsmanship of His design.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What is the hardest thing about accepting the Bible's account of creation?
- Why do people prefer to think the world came into existence by chance rather than at the word of an all-powerful Creator?

4.10. HOW DOES BIBLICAL CREATION AND EVOLUTION FIT TOGETHER?

Simply put, they do not fit together. The theory of evolution is based upon the premise that the building blocks for life were formed at the time of the Big Bang. Over time, this matter changed itself, growing and transforming into the life forms and systems we now see throughout our world. The Bible is clear when it describes God as the sole Creator of all things. God didn't use pre-existing materials because He didn't need them. Since God is by nature all-powerful, He didn't need to rely upon other things to create the universe.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do you think some Christians feel the need to fit creation and evolution together?

4.11. WHAT DID GOD CREATE ON EACH OF THE SIX DAYS?

According to the Bible account beginning in Genesis chapter 1, God created the universe in the following order:

- Day 1: God created the heavens and the earth, including the water which covered the earth. God also separated light from darkness.
- Day 2: God created the sky, separating the upper waters from the water which rested on the surface of the earth.
- Day 3: God established where the water on earth would be kept, providing places where dry land would be formed. On land, God created all varieties of plants, trees and vegetation.
- Day 4: God created the sun, the moon, and all of the stars.
- Day 5: God created all the fish in the sea and the birds of the air.
- Day 6: God created all the animals that would live on the land, including the special creation of mankind.
- Day 7: God rested from His work of creation. This serves as the model for us to take time each week to rest from our work and worship God (the Sabbath).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Consider the systematic order God used for creation. How does God's work on day one provide the groundwork for His work on day four? Day two for day five? Day three for day six?
- Discuss the marvelous way God designed the earth to be able to provide the needs of all animals and plants.

4.12. HOW WAS THE CREATION OF MAN DIFFERENT THAN THE REST OF UNIVERSE?

Mankind was created on the sixth day as the crown of God's creation. We were created in the "image" of God with an immortal soul and responsibilities to rule over God's creation.

There are several distinct differences that set mankind apart from the rest of God's creation. First, before He created man, God the Father spoke with the other two Persons of the Trinity (the Son and the Holy Spirit) regarding this special creation. The humans God intended to create would be uniquely created in God's own image; they would be like Him in wisdom, righteousness and holiness. Next, though God formed all animals from the dust of the ground (see Genesis 2:19), He did something special after forming man's body from dust—He breathed into the man's nostrils and gave him life (see Genesis 2:7). This unique act of creation sets man apart from the animals and plants, man alone has within him a living soul. God created man with a specific responsibility as well as the talents and abilities to be able to rule over the rest of creation (see Genesis 1:28). Finally, God fashioned a companion for the man He created by taking a rib out of him to create a woman, who was also made in His image and possessing a soul (see Genesis 2:21-22).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do we need to point out the special place humanity has in God's world?
- What are some ways we have abused our God-given authority over creation?

4.13. WHAT DID GOD DO AFTER HE FINISHED CREATING ALL THINGS?

God created the universe in six days, but the work of the Father didn't end there. Throughout the Bible, we read stories of how God continued to actively care for us and the world He created.

After Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, God was there to immediately promise a Savior who would save his people from their sinfulness. In fact, God has instructed us in the words of 1 Peter 5:7 to "cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." God took care of Noah and his family during the flood (see Genesis 9). God cared for Israel while they were in the wilderness (see Deuteronomy 8). God provided for Elijah, the widow and her son (see 1 Kings 17). God took care of Joseph, Mary and Jesus by alerting him to flee to Egypt (see Matthew 2). These are only a few of the many examples of how God showed love and care for His people, tending to their needs and insuring their safety.

To this day, God the Father continues to actively care for His creation. Our food, home, clothing, shelter, money and all other provisions are gifts given to us out of love by God.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How often do you find yourself worrying about your earthly needs?
- What is a good way to learn to trust God to provide them?

4.14. WHAT ARE ANGELS?

Angels are spirit beings God created during the six days of creation. They are many and powerful. The holy angels serve God by obeying His command, protecting mankind, especially children (see Matthew 18:10), and bringing special messages from God (see Luke 1:26-27).

When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of hand chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15-17)

DIGGING DEEPER

- *The Truth about Angels*, <http://lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#4.14> is a booklet to answer your questions on these mysterious beings.
- "Yes, Virginia. There are Angels", <http://blogs.lcms.org/2010/yes-virginia-there-are-angels-12-2010> provides more information on the topic.

Angels and humans are two very different creatures. Humans do not become angels when they die.

4.15. WHAT IS THE DEVIL?

God created all angels holy, but some rebelled against Him. The leading angel was Satan, also known as the devil. He assumed the form of a serpent and tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3). Later he tempted Jesus in the Wilderness (see Matthew 4:1-11). God limits Satan's works (see Job 1:6-12). On Judgment Day Jesus will cast Satan into hell forever (see Revelation 20:10).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it important for Christians to be aware of Satan's schemes?
- Why must we also remember that God is infinitely stronger and wiser than the devil?

DIGGING DEEPER

- *The Great Deceiver*: (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=23755>)
- *Satan: The Great Deceiver* - booklet: (<http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#4.15>)

4.16. IF GOD IS ACTIVE IN OUR WORLD TODAY, WHY DO BAD THINGS STILL HAPPEN?

When God first created the world, He created it to be perfect and without sin. However, once Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, evil and suffering came with it. Our sins have tainted God's creation and are now a part of life we must all endure. Pain, suffering, hardships, disease, accidents and tragedies are unfortunate but common experiences in our sin-filled world.

In spite of our failure to follow God's will, He has not abandoned us. In fact, it is because of God's grace and mercy that He has provided us the path to salvation through Christ.

Romans 8:28 gives us a clear reminder of the active love that God shows us in the face of the world's struggle. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." So while we will continue to deal with difficulties, we do so knowing we have a God who is there with us to guide everything that happens and make it turn out for our good—just as He brought our salvation out of the murder of His own Son Jesus.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What good have you seen God bring out of bad things that have happened in your life?

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, Holy Lord God, thank You for giving me life, providing for all my needs, and defending me from all danger. Thanks most of all for sending Your Son to be my Savior. I pray in His Holy Name. Amen.

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Session 5: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, in Your boundless love You sent Your Son Jesus Christ as our Savior. Teach me all He did to win my salvation that I may always put my trust in Him. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

5.1. WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity, one God with the Father who created all things and the Holy Spirit who gives us faith. Jesus is our Savior; the only Person who could meet the requirements needed to pay the price for our sins. He is the Son of God and the Savior promised by God from the time Adam and Eve first sinned. While fully God, He also became fully man. History agrees that Jesus was a Galilean Jew born a little more than 2,000 years ago. Even most historians agree He was a teacher or a prophet, who was eventually crucified by order of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. However, as is so often the case, there is more to the story.

5.2. HOW COULD JESUS BE BOTH A HUMAN AND GOD?

According to Colossians 2:9, Jesus was God in human form: "For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." To us this may seem complicated, if not impossible. It is indeed a miracle our minds cannot fully grasp—like the Trinity. This is how the angel Gabriel (<http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=G&word=GABRIEL>) explained it to Mary, who would become His mother:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the Child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ... For nothing will be impossible with God. (Luke 1:35, 37)

5.3. HOW DO WE KNOW THAT JESUS IS TRUE GOD?

The Bible clearly describes Jesus as God. The apostle John identifies Him this way:

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)

When the angel Gabriel announced the coming birth of Christ to Mary, he described Him using the following words:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His Name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:31-33)

This is reiterated by the angels when they proclaimed Jesus' birth to the shepherds in Luke's account of the birth of Christ:

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

Jesus also possesses the divine characteristics of God. He is eternal (see John 1:1-2), all-powerful, all-knowing, changeless and without sin. Jesus also demonstrated His divine power through the many miracles He performed, including the changing of water into wine, healing many sick and leprous people, casting out demons, calming a stormy sea, feeding thousands of people, and raising people from the dead.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe some benefits that come from being connected with family or friends in high places?
- Discuss the infinitely better benefits of being connected with God Himself through His Son.

DIGGING DEEPER

- Did Jesus Ever Say He was God? (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8037PD.mp3>)

5.4. HOW DO WE KNOW THAT JESUS IS TRUE MAN?

Once again, we find confirmation of Jesus' human nature in the Bible. Jesus was born to a human mother with a human body and a soul. As He grew from childhood into adulthood, Jesus experienced all the same emotions, feelings and experiences other people do. He felt hunger and thirst; He was tired; He slept; Jesus cried when He was sad; He got angry; and finally Jesus suffered and died.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Had Jesus not experienced life as a human, how much more difficult would it be to share your life experiences with Him?
- How does it change your perspective on Jesus to realize He has experienced this life "up close and personal"?

DIGGING DEEPER

- [What Did Jesus Not Know?](http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7547PD.mp3) (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7547PD.mp3>)
- [Did God Have to Become Man to Save Us?](http://blogs.lcms.org/2011/simple-12-2011) (article) (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2011/simple-12-2011>)
- [Jesus "Silent" Years](http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7606PD.mp3) (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7606PD.mp3>)

5.5. AS TRUE MAN, HOW WAS JESUS' HUMAN NATURE DIFFERENT THAN OURS?

While Jesus was born to a human mother, He did not have a human father. Thus He did not inherit the sinful nature we received from our sinful father and mother. He was conceived without sin. While announcing the coming birth of Jesus to Mary, the angel Gabriel explains to her how she will come to be with child despite being a virgin.

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the Child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

Another major difference between Christ and every other person who ever lived was the fact that Jesus lived without ever committing a sin. This is critically important because by living without sin, Jesus fulfilled the Law and therefore did not need to die. The fact He suffered and died was a choice He made so He could take our place. This is explained in the words of when Paul writes,

For our sake He (God) made Him (Christ) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

His death gave us life!

But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- In this life we are used to our "heroes" tripping and falling. What reassurance does it bring to know Jesus never slipped up?

5.6. WHY WAS IT NECESSARY FOR JESUS TO BE BOTH MAN AND GOD?

Jesus needed to be fully man so He could obey the Law in our place. Our sinfulness prevents us from being able to perfectly follow the Law as God requires. Jesus was the only Person to have ever lived without violating God's Law, earning eternal life for us. Jesus also had to be man to take our sin and guilt upon Himself and suffer the pain and agony of death on the cross as our perfect Substitute.

Jesus needed to be fully God so His single life and death could substitute for the sinful lives and deaths of every human who has ever lived or ever will live. What's more, Jesus needed to be God to overcome death, hell and the power of the devil. As Paul wrote and confirmed this victory to the church at Corinth (see [1 Corinthians 15](#)), (<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2015%20&version=ESV>) he reminded his readers to stand firm and be steadfast, knowing that Jesus paid the price in full so we might live lives that bring glory and honor to Him.

5.7. WHY DID JESUS DO ALL OF THIS FOR US?

John 3:16 explains why Jesus came down from heaven to live, die and rise again to save us from our sins: *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

Jesus loved His Father and left His throne in heaven to accomplish His Father’s plan to save sinful humanity—and that was a pretty scary plan! It involved Jesus suffering the punishment for our sins (death) for us. That is what He did on the cross. He loved us enough to lay down His life. He did this willingly and by His own choice. Again, John shows this clearly, as Jesus says,

“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father. (John 10:17-18)

Through Jesus’ sacrifice, we are set free from the bonds of sin. He bore the burden of our sin, suffering the consequences that were rightfully ours to face. Jesus stood in our place, taking from us our guilt, shame and the punishment for our sinfulness (see [Romans 5:19](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%205:19&version=ESV) [<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%205:19&version=ESV>]). In its place, He gave us the gift of forgiveness of our sins and victory over death, which is the eternal life He earned for us (see [1 Corinthians 15:55-57](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2015:55-57&version=ESV) [<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%2015:55-57&version=ESV>]).

If you think about it from a worldly perspective, very few people go out of their way to risk death in order to save another person. What would cause someone to even consider this? Love. Love is why husbands will fight to defend their wives. Love is why parents will do anything to ensure the well-being of their children. As humans, we understand the idea of protecting the things that mean the most to us. The same holds true for God. Stop and take a moment to consider the wonderful things God created: the vast expanse of heavens, the awesome power of a hurricane, the majesty of the mountains, the beautiful colors of a sunset. With those images in mind, realize that above all of those things, God set us apart as the most special part of His entire creation. We are His masterpiece! So in the same way that any loving Father would, God does what is necessary to reclaim His most loved possession.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7-8)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- When we feel like worthless failures, how does Jesus’ loving sacrifice remind us of our true value?
- How does God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ give us the confidence to assume the important position God has given us in our family, workplace and community?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Why is Jesus called a “The Lamb of God?” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7549PD.mp3>)

5.8. DOES THE CHURCH TEACH THAT JESUS CAME BACK TO LIFE AFTER HE DIED ON THE CROSS? REALLY?

Absolutely! This is one of the most important teachings of the church. It is so critical because Jesus’ coming back to life after dying for our sins proves that He has defeated death and the cause of death—sin. This is why Easter is the greatest celebration of the church year.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:16-22)

DIGGING DEEPER

- Read [1 Corinthians 15](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20corinthians%2015&version=ESV), (<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20corinthians%2015&version=ESV>) an entire chapter on this topic.
- Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead? (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8031PD.mp3>)

5.9. I KNOW THAT JESUS HAS SAVED ME, SO NOW WHAT?

Imagine for a moment it's Christmas morning and you have just received the most amazing gift ever. Think about the thrill of Christmas when you were a kid. What would your reaction be? Through Christ, we have received a gift far greater than any electronic game, car, or piece of jewelry. We have been given forgiveness, salvation and eternal life.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Our response to the knowledge of Christ's great gift for us begins by surrendering our lives to Him. In this case, we surrender our lives to God, allowing Him to dwell in our hearts as we seek to live according to His will.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Usually the word "surrender" carries negative thoughts of losing or forfeiting some freedom. What freedom do we actually receive when we surrender our selfish, hurtful desires and ambitions to God?

DIGGING DEEPER

- See how the lessons learned from sports are applicable to the real-life world of following Jesus in *Running the Race*, (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=20634>) a video-based Bible study.

5.10. WHAT DOES THE WORD "CHRIST" MEAN?

In the Old Testament, men who were called to fulfill certain offices would be anointed with oil to signify they had been chosen for that role. Those three offices were "prophet" (see 1 Kings 19:16), "priest" (see Exodus 30:30), and "king" (see 1 Samuel 16:13). Because the word "Christ" comes from the New Testament Greek word "christos," meaning "anointed," we find that Jesus Christ fulfills the anointing as our prophet, priest and king. In the Old Testament, the corresponding Hebrew word is "Messiah."

5.11. HOW IS JESUS OUR PROPHET?

A [prophet](#) is someone who speaks on God's behalf to the people. During His lifetime, Jesus confirmed Himself as the Messiah by fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies that were spoken concerning Him. This also shows through the words Jesus spoke, the miracles He performed and, ultimately, in His resurrection.

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen. (Deuteronomy 18:15)

Even today, through the Gospel written by His apostles, Jesus continues to proclaim Himself as the Son of God who gave His life to save the world.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

5.12. HOW IS JESUS OUR PRIEST?

A [priest](#) is someone who intercedes before God on behalf of the people. Jesus serves us as our Priest in three ways:

- 1.) Christ demonstrated an active obedience to God's Law by following it perfectly. Throughout His entire life, Jesus never committed a sin—in thought, word or deed.
- 2.) *He followed that with passive obedience when He sacrificed Himself for our sins, as John has written, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."* (1 John 2:2)
- 3.) Finally, Jesus continues to be our Priest as He intercedes with the Father on our behalf to show us mercy and grace.

5.13. HOW IS JESUS OUR KING?

The third office of Christ is that of our [King](#). In Matthew 28:18, Jesus informs us that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him, making Christ our ruler. As our King, Jesus governs and protects us as He leads us through life here on earth and in heaven for eternity.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What security does it bring to your life and future to know Jesus will always be with you as your Prophet, Priest and King?

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, my God and Savior, thank You for taking my sins upon Yourself and dying on the cross in my place. Fill me with such joy and peace that I may share this Good News everywhere I go. Amen.

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Session 6: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, You gave Your Son Jesus to save me from my sins. Now I want to learn about the Holy Spirit and what He does for us. Bless my studies in Jesus' Name. Amen.

6.1. WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity—one God with the Father and the Son. He is called God in the Bible:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:17)

He is not just the impersonal power of God or the energy of God. He is truly God—a personal Being. Jesus described the Holy Spirit as our Helper, Comforter and Counselor. He empowers us for living God-pleasing lives. He brings all of Jesus' gifts to us to equip us to accomplish our true purpose as we live on earth.

6.2. HOW LONG HAS THE HOLY SPIRIT BEEN AROUND?

He is the true and eternal God and was present at the creation of the world.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

He also was active in the lives of God's followers from the beginning. Even Joshua, an early figure in the Old Testament was described as someone in whom the Holy Spirit lived.

So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him." (Numbers 27:18)

6.3. WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO?

God the Father and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to spread the message of salvation through Jesus Christ in various ways.

1. He inspired each of the writers of the Bible, giving them every word that was written. The Bible is not a human invention. It is the product of the Holy Spirit!

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21)

2. He was present in key ways in the work of the Son, Jesus Christ. He caused the Virgin Mary to become pregnant with the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is a powerful worker of miracles that are instrumental in God's plan of salvation.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with Child from the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18)

The Holy Spirit confirmed Jesus as the true Son of God.

And the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased. (Luke 3:22)

Jesus was called the Christ because He was anointed with the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. (Luke 4:1)

The Spirit of God lived within Jesus, giving Him strength to accomplish His mission of salvation.

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. (Acts 10:38)

3. The Holy Spirit teaches us Jesus' message and through that message brings us to faith in Him.

(Jesus said) "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me. (John 15:26)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- When we think of our salvation from sin we often focus on the work of Jesus Christ, God's Son. Why is it important to remember how closely the Holy Spirit was involved in everything Jesus did?
- Many people try to cast doubts on the authority of the Bible. Why is it important to remember the Holy Spirit spoke each word of Scripture through its various writers?

6.4. HOW DID THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVE BIRTH TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

(1) The Holy Spirit launched the church on the day of Pentecost. Jesus' disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and given the gift of speaking in many languages.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4)

The listeners, who were from many countries, understood the Good News of salvation in Jesus, confessed their faith in Him, and were baptized. Thousands were brought to faith that day, beginning the era of the New Testament Christian church.

(2) After gathering the Christian church, the Holy Spirit nurtures the community of God's people so the mission of God to save all people continues to be accomplished.

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

(3) In order to accomplish this mission, the Holy Spirit created the office of pastor. God's plan for the church included servants who represent Him, serve His people, proclaim His Word, and equip all believers for witness and service. The Holy Spirit set men apart to serve as ministers of the Gospel.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- It's easy to see the church as a human organization, filled with hypocrites and sinners. Why is it important for us to remember the Holy Spirit is working within the church?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Of the Church" (<http://lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition#church>) from A Brief Statement on the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod

6.5. WHAT ROLE DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HAVE IN THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS IN JESUS?

The Holy Spirit causes us to believe in Jesus Christ. We have no ability to come to faith in Jesus ourselves, but the Holy Spirit creates faith in us and allows us to confess the Name of Jesus.

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

The Holy Spirit is the supernatural presence of God, doing what He wants, where He wants, and giving us new life in Him—a gift we could only receive from Him.

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-9)

The Holy Spirit gives you certainty of your salvation in Jesus Christ. This certainty comes through the promises of the Bible and through the tangible work of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13)

The Holy Spirit changes hearts and lives. Jesus taught clearly that Holy Spirit, called "the Helper," "the Counselor," and "the Comforter," would be the One who convicts us of sin and who directs us to new life in Jesus.

Jesus said, "But now I am going to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see Me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." (John 16:5-11)

6.6. HOW DO YOU KNOW THE HOLY SPIRIT IS IN YOU?

God promises that the Holy Spirit lives in you because Jesus purchased and won you when He paid the price for sin by dying on the cross.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

God promises that the Holy Spirit cleanses your life from sin; it's called "sanctification." The Holy Spirit, working through the Word, Baptism, and the gift of the Lord's Supper, empowers you to live a life that pleases God and follows His ways.

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

God promises that the Holy Spirit brings you the forgiveness of sins in Baptism. God works through ordinary water, blessing you with forgiveness and new life.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What are some times in life when God feels very far away?
- Why is it comforting to know the Holy Spirit works through things we can hear (the Bible), see, touch and taste (water of Baptism, bread and wine of Holy Communion) to reassure us of His presence and the forgiveness of our sins?

6.7. HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HELP YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN?

A clip from the movie *Hugo* illustrates how each of us seeks our purpose in life:

As you wonder about your purpose, the Holy Spirit gives you gifts and shows you why you are important to God here on earth and into eternity. The many spiritual gifts given by God work together to serve and build up the church. Every person in God's family is given spiritual gifts. These gifts are intended for humble service. Each person, as a unique child of God, has an important role in God's work here on earth.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Corinthians 12:4-14)

The Holy Spirit brings all that is good to your life. He grows God's character in you and causes you to do good works for the glory of God and for the blessing of His people.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no Law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25)

The Holy Spirit leads you to live a new life. You are no longer a slave to sin and darkness. Instead, you belong to Christ and are a new creation in Him.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. (Romans 8:9)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Holy Spirit prays for you in ways that are deeper than you can understand. If you are overcome with trouble and pain and cannot think of words that express your needs to God, the Holy Spirit understands those deep feelings and lifts them before God for you.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

The Holy Spirit gives you words to say when you tell others the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ and when you face persecution because of your faith.

(Jesus said) "And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." (Luke 12:11-12)

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What are some of the talents and abilities God has given you?
- How can they fit into the work of your congregation?
- Many Christians feel they must find the strength and motivation within to change their lives for Christ. How does it liberate you to know the Holy Spirit Himself changes you and provides all the strength and motivation you need to live for God?

6.8. WHAT IS THE VALUE OF GOOD WORKS?

As the Holy Spirit works in your life, He causes everything you do to glorify God. In addition to your acts of kindness and service, your normal day-to-day routines bring glory to God. These good works bring praise to God and bear witness to His love. However, good works do not earn favor from God. He gives His favor as a gift.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

(Jesus said) "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

6.9. IS ANYONE ABLE TO LIVE A PERFECTLY HOLY LIFE?

Only Jesus lived a perfect life. No matter how good we are, we are stained by sin in our thoughts, words and deeds. But God doesn't want us to sin more so we can receive more of His grace. He calls us to live lives that serve Him and bear witness to His goodness and love. *"None is righteous, no, not one."* (Romans 3:10b)

6.10. HOW DO YOU KNOW IF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS REALLY AT WORK?

You know the Holy Spirit is really at work because He always directs us to Jesus as true God and Savior. The ultimate test of the Spirit's presence is whether or not what is happening is pointing to Jesus Christ.

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. (1 John 4:2)

God truly wants your life to be united with Him now and forever. He demonstrated that by sending His Son, and seals that by sending the Holy Spirit to live within you. He's not about to take the Spirit away from you on a whim. As the Spirit leads you to daily confess your sins to God and ask for His forgiveness through Jesus, the Spirit Himself makes you confident He will always remain in your life.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:10-12)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it important to remember the Holy Spirit empowers your faith and repentance and never leaves you to your own resources?

DIGGING DEEPER

- [Signs of the Holy Spirit \(audio, http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7840PD.mp3\)](http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7840PD.mp3)

6.11. WHAT BLESSING DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVE YOU?

The Holy Spirit's presence in your life gives you everlasting hope. This hope is founded on God's loving sacrifice for you in Jesus. It is hope that endures—even as you face trial, struggle, doubt and uncertainty. The Holy Spirit fills you with certain hope in God who saved you, cares for you, and walks with you each and every day.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)

When we use the word “hope” we are usually uncertain about the thing for which we hope as in “I hope it doesn’t rain this weekend.” The Bible uses “hope” differently. When the things we hope for are sure promises of God, they are certain. We must simply wait until the time God fulfils them.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- When the uncertainty is removed from God’s promises, how does that give us patience as we wait for our hopes to be realized?
- How does this hope carry us through trials, difficult times, and even our approaching death?

Closing Prayer: Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of life, thank You for inspiring the writers of the Bible and for working through Your Word to bring me to faith in Jesus Christ. Continue to work through Your Word to keep me in this faith until Jesus returns. I pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

PRAYER

Session 7: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for making me Your own child in Jesus Christ, Your Son. Teach me how to pray, that I may share my life with You, and be confident You will hear and answer my prayers. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

7.1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is simply talking to God, communicating with the true and living God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Prayer is God's gift to us. As our Heavenly Father, God loves to hear from us. He delights in our requests, thanksgiving and praise. He is eager to hear our sorrow and sadness. God cares about each of us and promises He will respond to us as we speak with Him.

In Philippians the apostle Paul sums up God's invitation to pray and His gift of peace as we dialog with Him:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Prayer doesn't have to include fancy words or phrases. In fact, it is an exciting and heartfelt part of a healthy relationship with God.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What thoughts come to your mind when you think of prayer?
- What has been your experience with prayer?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "The Gift of Prayer" (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/the-gift-of-prayer-5-2012>) is an article that explains the great privilege of prayer.

7.2. WHY SHOULD I PRAY?

Jesus both commands and invites us to pray:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

With hope, faith and trust in God, we respond to His invitation to pray.

7.3. WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

Times that would seem natural for prayer include when we're in church, before meals, and at bedtime. But prayer isn't just for those venues. The Bible invites us to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). God wants us to be in an ongoing conversation with Him. Your prayers can be formal at times, but frequently they are simply a conversation—just like you might have with a friend. Sometimes you will pray out loud. At other times, you speak with God silently in your thoughts. God hears all your prayers and is glad when you take time to share your life with Him.

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Pray without Ceasing?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7723PD.mp3>)

7.4. WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

God invites you to communicate with Him just as you would communicate with a friend or family member who loves you and cares about you. You wouldn't only call that person when you want something from them. You call to thank them, to compliment them, to share your joys, your sorrows, and your life—and to share theirs. The same is true of our prayer life with God.

He invites you to confess your sins and failures to Him and ask for forgiveness.

I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)

He lets you know you can compliment Him for His great works.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. (Psalm 103:1-2)

God invites your requests and your thanksgiving.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

In other words, you can talk to Him about anything. No concern is too big or too small.

You are also invited to pray for others. Prayer is not just about your life, but also about caring for other people and asking God's blessing for their lives.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:1-6)

(Jesus said) "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How can expanding our prayers beyond simple personal requests and needs to include thanks and praise reinforce that prayer is about more than our concerns, it's our entire relationship with God?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "How Do I Pray" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8105PD.mp3>)

7.5. WHAT IS THE LORD'S PRAYER?

When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He responded with what has been called, "The Lord's Prayer." It is a good pattern and guide for prayer. In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus taught His disciples to pray. The traditional translation of the Lord's Prayer is this:

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Each phrase is packed with powerful prayer counsel:

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN: *We approach God as a good and faithful Father who loves us and seeks for us to be in a relationship with Him. God is good. He promises to show His goodness in our lives.*

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does it affect your thoughts about prayer when you think of God as your loving Father who cares about every facet of your life?

HALLOWED BY THY NAME: God's Name is holy. We, as His servants, want to honor His holiness and show the holiness of His Name in all we say, think and do.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- God's Name is His reputation and it impacts how we think of Him. What kinds of things happen in life which make it hard to see God as a holy, good, loving Father?
- How does the hurt we cause by our selfish words and actions harm God's reputation for others?

THY KINGDOM COME: In addition to eagerly wanting Jesus to come back and restore all things, we pray that God's work is active in our lives. We want Him to prevail with His blessing, His truth, and His mission. We also pray that our lives show what God's kind, gracious and righteous ways are all about to the world around us.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How can your words and actions help extend God's kingdom in your home, workplace and community?

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: God's will is for all people in the world to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. We humbly subject all our wants and desires to God's goals and desires for our lives and for the world.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it often so hard to subject our will under God's will?

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD: Jesus lets us know we can ask God to supply our daily needs. He cares about us to provide for us. No concern is too small for our faithful God.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do you think Jesus focuses our attention on today's needs rather than our future needs?

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US: We depend on God for the forgiveness of our sins. We also ask that His forgiveness flow through us to others in our lives. We are asking that God's spirit of grace and compassion takes hold in our relationships.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What happens to our relationships if we refuse to forgive each other?
- How can you forgive the really big sins other people commit against you?

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL: God doesn't tempt us, but He sometimes permits us to go through difficult times to teach us to rely on Him and not ourselves or others. Satan uses those same situations to tempt us to doubt our Father's love, and turn away from Him and His will for us. We pray that He keeps us from everything that would lead us away from His will. We also pray He would protect us and our loved ones from all evil and harm.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe a test you have gone through in your life. In what ways did it pull you away from God, and in what ways did it draw you closer to Him?
- Why must we be careful when we try to figure out for ourselves or explain to others why God is permitting us to go through difficult times?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "He Speaks, We Listen" (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/he-speaks-we-listen-5-2012>) is an article that extols the Lord's Prayer.
- "The Lord's Prayer" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1085>) is a pamphlet in which you can find out more about each portion of the Lord's Prayer and how it can help you pray.

7.6. HOW DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER?

God answers every prayer of a believer. Sometimes He says, “Yes.” Other times He says, “No, I have something better in mind.” Still other times He says, “Wait for My answer; the time is not right yet.”

Throughout the ages God has rescued people from trouble and has provided for their needs. His greatest “Yes” was in sending His Son Jesus to save us from eternal separation from Him and give us the gift of eternal life.

But there are times when God responds with the answer “No” to our prayers. It is during those times we are called to trust Him. Jesus experienced that Himself. Even when He begged with tears to be delivered from the suffering He was to face on the cross, God responded “No” (see Matthew 26:36-42). God’s plan was to save us through the sacrifice of His Son. The apostle Paul wrestled with God’s answer of “No” to his prayer, but in faith he was able to move forward:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Sometimes God responds to our prayers by having us wait for Him and by letting us decide our own course of action. Along this journey, we are called to trust His timing and His ways, knowing that He loves us and has our best interest at heart—as well as the best interest of all those who will be impacted by His answers to our prayers.

But for You, O LORD, do I wait; it is You, O Lord my God, who will answer. (Psalm 38:15)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe a time you were better off not receiving what you wanted.

7.7. IF GOD DIDN'T SAY YES TO MY PRAYER, WAS IT BECAUSE I DIDN'T PRAY ENOUGH?

Prayer is not a ritual or work that earns God’s favor or causes your wishes to come true. Prayer is a gift of God, expressing an intimate relationship with Him and a steady trust in Him. God wants you to approach Him with humility and trust. If your prayer isn’t answered the way you want it to be, you are called to trust your Heavenly Father who loves you and promises to care for you always.

Jesus offered wise words about our prayer life:

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:5–9)

If God already knows what we need before we ask, some might wonder why we should still pray? That’s missing the point about prayer. It is not about what we can get from God, but about building our trust and our relationship with our loving, faithful Father.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- As a teenager, what things were you uncomfortable discussing with your parents?
- What things do you regret not sharing with them?
- In what way is our prayer life with our Heavenly Father like that? How is it different?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “No Is a Good Thing” (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/no-is-a-good-thing-5-2012>) is an article explaining why God sometimes does not grant the requests we make in prayer.

7.8. HOW DO I LISTEN TO GOD?

In prayer we speak to God, but how does He give us His answer? Many people look to circumstances in their lives, but each event in our lives is a small piece of the puzzle. Often in the middle of a situation we can't know why God does what He does. It's all a matter of trusting the good and gracious will of our Heavenly Father.

In such times the only safe place to seek God's answer is in His Word, the Bible. The Bible is living and active:

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

As God's Word lives in you, the Holy Spirit will teach you and bring to mind God's Word for your life. He will strengthen your confidence that your Father is doing what is best for you and everyone associated with you. Jesus said,

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:26)

The Bible invites you to let God's Word dwell in you so that you will be tuned in to God's leading and will for your life.

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)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe a situation when you weren't sure where God was guiding you.
- How would you deal with a similar situation today?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Listen to God's Voice" (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/listen-to-gods-voice-5-2012>) is an article that explains that we must be wary of "listening to our heart" as God's response to our prayer. Rather we trust God is speaking to us in the words of the Bible.

7.9. WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR AM TOO UPSET TO PRAY?

When you don't know what to say or can't even speak, the Bible promises the Holy Spirit prays for you with groans too deep for words.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

The Bible also assures you that Jesus Himself intercedes for you—prays on your behalf.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:31-34)

Because of His love for you, God makes sure your prayers are heard and your needs are understood by God.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Jesus already told us the Father knows what we need before we ask. What added confidence do you get knowing Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also bringing your needs before Him?

DIGGING DEEPER

- *Prayer: When You Don't Know What to Say* (booklet, <http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#7.9>)

7.10. WHAT ATTITUDE SHOULD I HAVE IN PRAYER?

It is important to come to God with humility and repentance—acknowledging your imperfection and failure, trusting in His mercy, and sacrificing your will for His. Prayer is not a tool to use so you can get your own way. It is yielding your complete self to the hands of your Savior who cares for you. Sometimes God humbles us and prepares us for approaching Him in prayer as this [movie clip](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOgdjlPRWMg) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOgdjlPRWMg>) from *Bruce Almighty* illustrates.

God calls us to pray:

In faith:

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. (James 1:6-7)

Seeking His will:

And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. (1 John 5:14)

In the Name of His Son, Jesus:

(Jesus said) "In that day you will ask nothing of Me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My Name, He will give it to you." (John 16:23)

We often include these three features when we request something, and then we say, "If it is Your will. In Jesus' Name. Amen." The Hebrew word "Amen" is faith's strong confidence that God will answer our prayer as He has promised.

7.11. WHAT HELP CAN I FIND FOR MY PRAYER LIFE?

Online apps and other prayer resources can be found here: <http://www.lcms.org/pray>

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father what a tremendous privilege You give Your children to pray to You—the God and Creator of all. Give me confidence You will always hear and answer my prayers for Jesus' sake. Amen.

BAPTISM

Session 8: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus Christ was baptized, and commanded all of us to be baptized. Help me better understand this great gift and how You make it work throughout my life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

I know what you might be thinking. How seriously should you view your Baptism? After all, it's just a short, spiritual ceremony, a quick splash or two, right? Wrong! Baptism is so much more!

Baptism is an extremely significant and powerful moment in the life of a Christian. It is a special gift from God, for the individual. Called a sacrament, it is the very promise by God that He has claimed you and you are His forever! Your Baptism never runs out of its forgiving power, ever!

Christians take Baptism very seriously because it is God's blessings and promise upon them! Why would Christians desire as many people to be baptized as possible? When you have good news, *really Good News*, you want to share it!

8.1. A SACRAMENT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING "SACRED." IS THAT CORRECT?

Yes! A sacrament is a sacred or holy act God does for His people—which takes away their sin and makes them holy or sacred. It is a divine act

1. instituted by God;
2. in which God Himself has joined His Word of promise to visible elements;
3. by which He offers, gives and seals the forgiveness of sin earned by Christ.

8.2. HOW CAN BAPTISM SAVE ME? I THOUGHT JESUS DOES THE SAVING.

Undoubtedly Jesus saved us by paying for our sins on the cross. But Baptism is a means by which He gives us the forgiveness and peace He earned through His suffering, death and resurrection. See [means of grace](http://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition#meansofgrace). (<http://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition#meansofgrace>)

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16a)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:3-7)

Moreover, He gives and delivers to us this certainty through Baptism so that we know and have assurance that His forgiving Word has covered us and we have been saved by Him.

Because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:20-21)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it important that Baptism always remains linked to Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "What is Baptism" (<http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8020PD.mp3>)
- "Holy Baptism" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1086>) is a short article on the teaching.

8.3. WHO IS DOING THE WORK OR ACTION IN BAPTISM—THE INDIVIDUAL OR GOD?

Baptism is entirely God's work, 100 percent upon and towards the individual. Remember, it is not what your word says about God; rather, it is what God's Word says about you. You are forgiven because God says you are. God is making the public announcement, not the individual.

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What is the difference between seeing Baptism as something you do for God and seeing it as something God does for you?
- What kinds of questions or doubts would come to mind if Baptism's effectiveness depended on you?

8.4. WHY IS BAPTISM NOT JUST WATER ONLY?

Only the Word of God can forgive us of our sins, without God's forgiving Word, one is just "swimming" aimlessly. For the Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12a)

8.5. WHY IS BAPTISM NOT JUST WORD ONLY, DO I REALLY HAVE TO GET WET?

Baptism is not simply a spiritual event in the life of the individual, but also a physical event that can be witnessed and experienced through our senses. God reminds us His salvation is not just for our spirit, but for our spirit and body. We "take the plunge," so to speak, and get wet in Baptism to remind us Jesus has washed us completely—body and spirit. The word for "baptize" in the original language of the New Testament is the general word for washing.

And there are many other traditions that they (the Pharisees) observe, such as the washing (baptizing) of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. (Mark 7:4b)

8.6. IS THERE ONLY ONE SPECIAL WAY TO GET BAPTIZED?

All that is required is water and God's Word, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." The amount of water used, the location of a Baptism, or the time we're baptized, does not matter. Water can be sprinkled or poured on the person, or the person can be dipped in it; any way is acceptable. Some Christians insist Baptism is only valid if the entire body is immersed in the water. But Jesus never specifically requires immersion; instead, He commands His church to baptize. Jesus showed by His use of the word "baptize" in connection with cleaning up after meals that it can refer to immersion, pouring or sprinkling:

And there are many other traditions that they (the Pharisees) observe, such as the washing (baptizing) of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches. (Mark 7:4b)

When they washed (baptized) dining couches, they certainly did not immerse them.

Sponsors, also known as "godparents," are not necessary, but are certainly helpful to the newly baptized person. Sponsors are to help the new Christian (1) grow in his or her faith; (2) understand and use God's Word; and (3) appreciate the many blessing of Baptism. In the case of young children getting baptized, sponsors are witnesses who can attest the child was actually baptized.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does the variety of ways one can baptize or wash focus our attention on the Word of God spoken; rather, than the way in which the water is applied?
- What does that say about the importance of God's Word in this holy act?

8.7. IF BAPTISM IS SO IMPORTANT, WHY IS IT NOT MENTIONED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Baptism is mentioned first in the New Testament in the third chapter of Matthew. Besides, very early in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, God instituted a holy act that was the Old Testament equivalent of Baptism.

Every male descendant of Abraham was to be circumcised when he was eight days old. That act brought them into God's covenant with Abraham and made them God's own children. Jesus bridged circumcision and Baptism by being circumcised when He was eight days old, and baptized when He was around 30.

There are actually some really amazing Old Testament stories that foreshadow God's grace for His people through water Baptism. Here are a few times when God saved his people through water, brought them into a land of promise, and gave them a new name: the **Flood** in Genesis 7; Jacob crossing the **Jabbok River** in Genesis 32; the Israelites crossing the **Red Sea** in Exodus 14; and crossing the **River Jordan** in Joshua 3.

8.8. WHY DO MOST CHRISTIANS BAPTIZE INFANTS?

While some churches object to this, it is the long-standing teaching of the vast majority of Christians.

The Bible gives us four reasons as to why infants should be baptized:

1.) Jesus commanded His church to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. Since babies receive citizenship at birth, they are included in the "all nations" Jesus commanded His church to baptize.

(Jesus said) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20a)

Likewise, the book of Acts records Peter's words on the matter:

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord calls to Himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

Again, we would certainly consider newborn babies our children.

2.) Jesus also especially invited little children to come to Him.

And they were bringing children to Him that He might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, He was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to Me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." (Mark 10:13-15)

Once again, newborn babies certainly qualify as "little children."

3.) Babies are sinners who need the forgiveness Baptism offers.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psalm 51:5)

(We) were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:3b)

4.) Since faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, He is able to work faith in a baby.

(Jesus said) "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

8.9. DON'T CHILDREN HAVE TO BE OLD ENOUGH TO BELIEVE?

No one, no matter their age, is able to believe on their own. The Bible teaches that if a person has faith, it is always given by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Scripture never refers to an age when a child becomes accountable for his or her sin. For as we saw in the Ephesians 2:3 passage above, "[We] were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

Sin is in all of us (even in the womb):

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). That means all of us are accountable for our sin from the time of conception. The Bible teaches *"the wages of sin is death"* (see Romans 6:23), and, sadly, babies die. Therefore, Baptism is important for everyone, including infants!

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Baptism offers parents the certainty their babies have been given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit. Why shouldn't parents want to ensure their babies are baptized at the earliest opportunity?

8.10. IF I WAS BAPTIZED AS A BABY, DO I NEED TO BE RE-BAPTIZED AS AN ADULT?

No! You have been given your name at birth, and it remains with you the rest of your life, right? Well, so does the promise of God upon you at your Baptism; it is with you forever!

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

8.11. CAN I BE SAVED WITHOUT BAPTISM?

A famous Church Father of the early Christian church, St. Augustine, once said, "It is not the absence of Baptism that condemns us, but the absence of faith." God makes it clear to us that He wants us to be baptized and to baptize. To argue otherwise would be rejecting God's loving and gracious will for us.

(Jesus said) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

In the case of babies or young children we baptize first, then teach the faith when they are old enough to understand. In the case of older children and adults, we teach the faith first, then baptize. This is because the Holy Spirit creates saving faith through the Word of God and through Baptism.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What might be some reasons or situations that would make it impossible to baptize a person before he or she dies?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Will an Unbaptized Believer Go To Heaven?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7412PD.mp3>) discusses the role of faith in salvation and the blessing of Baptism.

8.12. IS BAPTISM A GET-INTO-HEAVEN-FREE CARD?

Baptism truly brings us Jesus' salvation because of the faith the Holy Spirit creates in us through water and the Word. It is this faith in Jesus Christ that makes us right in God's eyes. If a baptized person rejects the faith and never returns to Jesus Christ, his baptism will not save him.

But while this life continues, God still holds out His offer of salvation through our Baptism—no matter how long ago we were baptized. When God brings us to repentance through His Law and restores our faith in Jesus through the Gospel, our Baptism again joins us to Christ's death and resurrection. Our sins are removed, and we are God's children anew.

(Jesus said) "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."
(Mark 16:16)

8.13. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM IN OUR DAILY LIFE?

Thinking about Baptism reminds us that every day our old, sinful nature, with its evil actions and desires, should be drowned by our repentance. Through God's forgiveness and Baptism, we are daily washed clean and can live new lives of goodness and holiness.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

The name of the game in Baptism is assurance! We can be assured we are saved by God because He says so by the power of His Word!

Closing Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, in Baptism You adopt us as Your own children, brothers and sisters of Your Son Jesus Christ. Keep us in this faith that we may live with You in heaven forever. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Session 9: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, I want to be confident of Your complete forgiveness for Jesus' sake. Teach me how You provide that certain peace through Confession and Absolution. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Imagine sitting face to face with someone and opening up about shameful things you have said and done. The very idea of declaring our sins out loud to another person is a terribly frightening thought, to say the least. The Bible doesn't require us to confess our sins to another person, but offers it as a comforting consolation, if you ever find your heart and soul weighed down with guilt, shame and doubts. When you confess your sins, the church—through the pastor or others—assures you from the Bible that Jesus paid the price for that sin, and speaks God's forgiveness to you.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Discuss some sins and situations that could drive a person to seek the reassurance of private confession and absolution.

9.1. WHAT IS THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS?

The *Office of the Keys* (<http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=k&word=KEYS.OFFICEOFTHE>) is a unique power God has given to His church to forgive the sins of those who confess their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior. Two parts make up the Office of the Keys: Confession (admitting our sins) and *Absolution* (<http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=A&word=ABSOLUTION>) (receiving forgiveness from God). We are drawn by God's Law to confess, and by His Gospel we are forgiven or absolved.

9.2. WHERE DOES THE PHRASE OFFICE OF THE KEYS COME FROM, ANYWAY?

The words are drawn from the imagery and directive Jesus shared with His 12 apostles.

(Jesus said) "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19)

9.3. WHAT IS A CONFESSION, EXACTLY?

In a broad sense, a confession is a truthful statement publically made by an individual, or group of individuals. A confession of sin is admitting to God what you have done wrong according to His Law—the Ten Commandments. A confession of faith, such as the Apostles', Nicene, or Athanasian Creeds, is a public witness made by Christians to the faith they believe and teach.

Here we speak of confession in the sense of admitting our sins to God and trusting His promise of forgiveness. This confession can be made publicly or privately.

DIGGING DEEPER

- "*Confession and Absolution*" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1087>) is a pamphlet that provides more details on the subject.

9.4. WHY DO WE NEED TO REPENT OF OUR SINS?

God calls us to confess and, ultimately, it is God whom we have offended with our sins.

(Jesus said) "Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops." (Luke 12:3)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

9.5. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF WE DON'T REPENT?

Guilt has a way of exerting a powerful pressure on us. If we hide our sins or unwisely attempt to justify them in God's eyes, a destructive stress grows on the mind and even the body. We long to "come clean" as it were. God truly offers complete forgiveness to all who believe that Jesus carried all their sins to the cross.

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:3-5)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- "Is Repentance Just Saying You're Sorry?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7416PD.mp3>)
- List some sins that people really enjoy committing.
- What should you do if you know you should feel sorrow over a sin you are committing, but you still really like doing it?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Edgar Allen Poe offers a unique portrayal of what guilt can do to a person in his infamous short story, "The Tell-Tale Heart." (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/telltale.html>)

9.6. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CONFESSION?

In public confession, all the members of a congregation publicly confess their sins together. These sins are summed up in general and confessed to God. Then the pastor announces God's forgiveness or absolution—since Jesus paid the full price for all sins in His suffering and death on the cross.

Sometimes a specific sin weighs heavily on your conscience. When this is the case, private confession gives you the chance to confess that specific sin and be assured that God forgives that very sin for Jesus' sake.

Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out. (Acts 3:19)

Perhaps you are wondering, can I go to heaven if I never go to private confession? Since God offers complete and free forgiveness by grace through faith you do not have to go to private confession. Think of it as a special gift of God for times when you may struggle with a guilty conscience.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Discuss the different ways God has provided to reassure us He has forgiven all our sins for Jesus' sake.
- How certain does God want you to be about your salvation in Jesus Christ?

9.7. WHEN A CONGREGATION CONFESSES ITS SINS DURING A CHURCH SERVICE, DOES THAT MEAN THEY ARE ALL FORGIVEN?

On the cross Jesus won forgiveness for every sin of each person who has ever lived or will ever live. In the church service God indeed offers that complete and free forgiveness to each person there. Those who trust in Jesus are completely forgiven. If people are merely pretending, denying in their hearts, or "going through the motions," then no, God is not fooled, and their sin remains.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it so easy to fall into the rut of just going through the motions when attending church?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “Confession without Contrition” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7851PD.mp3>) is a conversation on the practical implications of this teaching.

9.8. TO WHOM SHOULD WE CONFESS OUR SINS PRIVATELY?

Any fellow Christian can offer you God's forgiveness. A pastor may be preferable because he knows the expectations of God's Law and passages of Scripture to reassure you God has forgiven your sin no matter how grievous. Also, he has publicly taken an oath before God to never repeat sins confessed to him.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What do you think are some reasons Christians may be reluctant to go to their pastor for private confession?

9.9. I AM NOT SURE I LIKE THE IDEA OF ANOTHER PERSON FORGIVING“ME OF MY SINS. ISN'T GOD THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?

Like Baptism, Absolution is anchored in Jesus' saving work on the cross. Jesus paid the full price for all sins when He suffered and died, meaning God offers forgiveness to every man, woman and child. So it is not the person who is forgiving you of your sins. He or she is merely a vessel, a vehicle, delivering the forgiveness-filled Word of God to you. It is actually God who is forgiving you in that moment. One of the ways God shares His Word is through the office of the pastoral ministry, delivering grace and mercy to His people. This is as valid, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, stood before us and spoke those words of forgiveness with His own lips.

And when He (Jesus) had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.” (John 20:22-23)

9.10. HOW CAN I TRUST MY PASTOR NOT TO REVEAL THE SPECIFIC SINS I CONFESS TO HIM PRIVATELY?

Pastors take a public oath when they take office not to reveal or repeat specific sins confessed to them privately. This is based on a promise God made in the book of Isaiah:

I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

When God forgives our sins He removes them completely and remembers them no more. The pastor promises never to reveal or even repeat your privately confessed sin because God will never reveal or repeat it, and He has completely blotted it out of His memory.

Martin Luther spoke a lot about having a “Father Confessor,” someone to regularly and genuinely listen to your confessed sin and personally provide you with the comfort of forgiveness of God's Word. Quite simply, any pastor who would reveal a privately confessed sin is not fit for the office of pastor or overseer.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (1 Timothy 3:1-5)

DIGGING DEEPER

- “How Private is Private Confession?” (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7626PD.mp3>) discusses various issues on this topic, especially a pastor’s promise never to reveal a confession.

9.11. CAN I FORGIVE PEOPLE WHO CONFESS THEIR SINS TO ME TOO?

Yes, you can! It’s not uncommon for people to wrestle, struggle, and even find themselves tormented by their own personal dark, innermost sins. Any Christian that understands the power of Confession and Absolution can serve as an instrument of God’s Word, and assure a struggling individual of God’s wonderful forgiveness.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.
(Proverbs 11:13)

9.12. WHAT WAS THAT PART ABOUT WITHHOLDING FORGIVENESS? IF FORGIVENESS FROM GOD IS SUCH A WONDERFUL THING, THEN WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE NOT TO BE FORGIVEN?

The Office of the Keys works both ways. While God gives His church the key to unlock the door to salvation, it also has the power to lock the door to salvation. This is not a quick, abusive process that happens flippantly or emotionally. It is a slow, gradual process, which must be done in love and genuine concern for the salvation of the unrepentant sinner.

(Jesus said) “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

9.13. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EXCOMMUNICATION AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

While the terms conjure thoughts or images of painful exclusion, the intention and purpose is actually the complete opposite! God is deeply concerned about His straying child. He knows if this person continues in unrepented sin he or she will exclude him or herself from God’s forgiveness and peace, from fellowship with God in heaven itself. The purpose of church discipline and excommunication is to show how serious God is about sin, and to bring the sinner to recognize and repent of his or her sins now, so God can forgive and restore him or her.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ. (Ephesians 4:15)

God openly declares, “*The wages of sin is death*” (see Romans 6:23). Who among us wants to have that hanging over his or her head? We can either hold onto our sin and be eternally doomed, or ask God to take it away by His Word of grace and forgiveness, as He did for David:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment. (Psalm 51:1-4)

You can think of church discipline and excommunication as God’s version of “tough love.” It won’t help an unrepentant sinner recognize his sin and turn from his error if the church pretends God is fine with the sinful behavior and the sinner’s refusal to repent.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What are some of the ways well-meaning parents actually reinforce their teenage child’s destructive behaviors?
- What are some of the tough steps parents may need to take to wake up their child before it’s too late?

Closing Prayer: Holy Lord Jesus, You gave the church the gift of Absolution. Thank You for that gift of complete and free forgiveness through my pastor and others. Amen.

COMMUNION

Session 10: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, You gave us Communion as a great and precious gift. Teach me what I should know about it, so I may receive its great blessings. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Breaking of the Bread ... these are all terms used interchangeably with "Communion." Whatever we call it, in this meal Jesus Christ is actually feeding His people with His very own body and blood. That is correct; you read that right! While this practice might sound a little peculiar, it comes directly from Jesus Himself. There is a powerfully divine purpose behind it or, rather, in, with, and under it!

10.1. WHAT IS COMMUNION, EXACTLY?

It is a Sacrament that gives us the true body and blood of Jesus Christ. His body and blood are joined with the bread and wine for us Christians to eat and drink. Don't worry; this is not cannibalism. It is a special, spiritual meal where the table is set by the Lord Jesus Himself with heavenly food. He instituted it on the night before He died, commanding His followers to continue practicing it. As the apostle Paul writes,

The Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23b-26)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why might some people find it hard to accept Jesus' body and blood are actually present in the bread and wine?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "The Sacrament of the Altar" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1088>) is a pamphlet explaining various aspects of this teaching.

10.2. WHAT IS HAPPENING IN COMMUNION?

By the power of Christ's Word, in Communion, the formerly separated are joined together:

1. The body and blood of His Son Jesus Christ are joined to the bread and the wine, and given to the believer to eat and drink.

And He (Jesus) took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." (Luke 22:19-20)

2. The believer is in union with Christ. By the very act of eating and drinking, Christ is in us and a part of us. This is possible only because this body and blood forgives the sins of the believer.

(Jesus said) "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:27b-28)

3. God's people are joined in union with other believers in Christ, both living and those already in heaven. During Communion it is as if the heavens are opened, and we share in a joyful meal, full of celebration and singing!

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17)

10.3. WHEN AND, PERHAPS, MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

In the celebration of Communion (we don't know exactly when), the Lord miraculously unites His body with the bread and His blood with the wine. This "consecrated" bread and wine become a means by which God transports His forgiveness won on the cross to His people.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28)

10.4. HOW CAN I REALLY BELIEVE THIS IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING?

Jesus is at the same time the Giver of the supper, and the Gift Himself in the bread and the wine. Christ's body and blood that flowed from the cross are really and truly present in the Sacrament. It is not humanly comprehensible to grasp how this precisely is possible, but by Holy Spirit-given faith we believe in the truth of Jesus' Words "This is My body, this is My blood."

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it hard for us to believe that this miracle happens at each celebration of Communion?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Where in the Bible does it say that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Lord's Supper?" (FAQ) (<http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine#present>)

10.5. SO, ARE THE BREAD AND WINE LITERALLY CHANGED INTO THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST?

No, the Bible clearly states the bread and wine are still present during the sacramental meal.

For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Some Christians teach that every time Communion takes place, Jesus Christ is literally being sacrificed again, and again. The Bible says that everything was completed by the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

For by a single offering He (Jesus) has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)

Christ sacrificed Himself on the cross once to forgive the world of its sin. This one death (and resurrection) was sufficient for our forgiveness. In Communion Jesus brings us this same body and blood, which were given and shed for us in His bodily sacrifice on the cross.

And as they were eating, He (Jesus) took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is My body." (Mark 14:22)

10.6. WHO SHOULD TAKE COMMUNION?

People who desire to be reassured of God's forgiveness and presence should hunger and thirst for the Sacrament that most closely ties us to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, which won our forgiveness.

Those who desire Communion carefully examine their hearts and repent of their sins in thought, word and deed. They believe the Good News of Jesus' victory over death, and that they are receiving the very body and blood of Christ.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

Contrary to what some may think, Christians don't think of themselves as perfect people who never sin. We know we are sinners like everyone else. However, all believers who have been instructed in Communion, examine themselves, sincerely repent, and genuinely seek forgiveness of sins are welcome to commune. It does not matter how far away from God they may *feel*. If the slightest faith is there, God will comfort, forgive and strengthen it. Isaiah the prophet offers some comforting words of God's everlasting mercy:

A bruised reed He (God) will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench. (Isaiah 42:3a)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What reassurance does it bring to know Communion is especially given to strengthen and increase faith of those whose faith is weak?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Is Communion Necessary?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7744PD.mp3>)

10.7. AM I CORRECT TO THINK THAT MAYBE NOT EVERYONE SHOULD TAKE COMMUNION?

Think of Communion like a powerful medicine Jesus Christ has prescribed for us. As long as it is taken in the way He instructs it will bring tremendous healing and benefit to our spirit, soul, mind and body. But if we misuse it, we will suffer harm.

See 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 above.

The ironic truth is that while it seems unloving for the church to exclude others from Communion, they actually are deeply concerned about the welfare of others. The church truly desires everyone to be able to partake of Communion. The big key, however, is receiving it rightly. Therefore the practice of "close" or "closed" Communion is to protect those who would be harmed by receiving the Sacrament in the wrong way.

What would be the loving thing to do if you saw someone smoking near an open container of gasoline? If you snatch the cigarette away, that person may not understand the action at first. But with an explanation of the danger, the response eventually would be one of gratitude.

Serving Christ's body and blood to someone who would be harmed by it would be just as unloving.

In addition, the Lord's Supper is intended to show the unity of the people who commune together. Therefore, those who commune together should be in agreement about the teachings of the church. (See Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 10:17.)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Can you think of other examples when the best thing is to tell someone "no" to something they may desire or want to do?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Here's a brief [FAQ](http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine#partake) on who should participate in Communion. (<http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine#partake>)

10.8. SO WHEN IS PERSON READY TO GO TO COMMUNION?

People are ready when

1.) They believe in Jesus Christ as true God and Savior and are willing to repent of their sins:

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:28)

2.) They are willing to forgive those who sin against them:

(Jesus said) "If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15)

3.) They believe that Jesus' body and blood is truly present:

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:29)

4.) They can examine themselves: examples of those not able to examine themselves include young children, those who have not been instructed in the Christian faith, and those profoundly mentally impaired or unconscious.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Go through each of the four cases above. Would anyone in these situations really feel a true hunger or thirst for God's forgiveness in Communion?

10.9. WHAT IF I AM STRUGGLING WITH SOMETHING THE CHURCH CALLS A SIN, BUT I AM NOT SURE I AGREE?

It would be wise to discuss your thoughts on the matter, and seek further clarification from the Bible.

Any time a pastor or church community glosses over a sin, or looks the other way and gives Communion, the impression is being given that God is "okay" with the behavior, even if it destroys faith and leads to unrepentance.

Even worse, this license to sin can spread, causing other people to think lightly of committing this sin as well. This very thing happened in the church in Corinth. A person was living openly in a way that was contrary to the teachings of the Bible, and the church approved! Paul asked them to put the man out of the church.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ... When you are assembled in the Name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 4-7)

Happily, by the time Paul wrote his next letter to the church in Corinth, this action had accomplished its Christ-given purpose: the man had repented of his sin.

For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. (2 Corinthians 2:6-8)

This reaffirmation of love included restoring their repentant brother to communion.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do people confuse discipline with a lack of love and respect?
- How does church discipline reflect true love for our brothers and sisters?

10.10. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO EXAMINE MYSELF BEFORE TAKING COMMUNION?

Be honest with yourself and with God by asking questions like these:

- 1.) Am I truly sorry for my sins?
- 2.) Do I truly believe Jesus is present in this meal as the Giver and the Gift?
- 3.) Do I desire with the help of God to turn from my sinful habits?

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Discuss how each of these questions can actually increase our hunger and thirst for the Lord's Supper.

10.11. WHAT IS THE MAIN THING TO REMEMBER ABOUT COMMUNION IN ALL OF THIS?

All this talk of Communion shows it is very powerful stuff! Jesus meant for it to be a powerful blessing in your life. The chief blessing above all is that Christ is coming to you to be united with you and bestowing the greatest gift of all—the forgiveness of sin! With that forgiveness, you know you have life now and life forever with God. It is a tiny foretaste of all the blessings God wants to give to you!

(Jesus said) "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross You sacrificed Your body and blood for our sins. Thank You for giving us that same body and blood in Communion for our forgiveness, strength and peace. Guard my heart to always receive You in a worthy manner. Amen.

THE END OF TIME

Session 11: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, Jesus promised that He will return again to judge the living and the dead. Teach me more about Judgment Day so I will be ready for His return. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

When He (Jesus) had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11)

Ever wondered what it will be like to be around when Jesus returns and this world comes to an end? Everyone seems to have some thought, idea or theory about the end of the world. There are even some groups that boldly predict precisely when the end of the world will occur, and have done so multiple times throughout history! We can be confident about one thing: any prediction is wrong.

(Jesus said) "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mark 13:32)

So what can we know about Jesus' return?

11.1. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT CHRIST'S SECOND COMING?

Actually, a lot! For starters, we know Jesus will return in a similar manner as He left—that all will instantaneously see and know, and we are asked to be prepared for false teachings as the end of this world draws near.

(Jesus said) "False christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." (Mark 13:22-27)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- In light of the false prophets and false christs God warns us against, why is it more important than ever to attend worship regularly and be active in Bible study and prayer?

11.2. WHAT WILL JESUS DO WHEN HE COMES AGAIN?

The Bible teaches that when Jesus comes again, He will do a number of things:

1.) He will bring the dead back to life:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

2.) He will judge all people:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

3.) He will end this world that is filled with problems and create new heavens and a new earth that will be perfect:

But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:13)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Discuss the comfort we can draw from God's promises that through all eternity we will be reunited together with loved ones who have died in faith.
- What problems of this present life do you most look forward to seeing Jesus remove when He returns?

11.3. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE BELIEVERS WHEN JESUS RETURNS?

When Jesus comes again, He will instantly heal and transform the bodies of all living believers and make them immortal. He will bring back the spirits of those who have died in faith and reunite them with their perfect risen bodies. We will enjoy peace and happiness in never-ending bliss living together with God.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is this promised future so much better than living in this world forever?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Judgment Day" for the believer (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7752PD.mp3>)
- "Are These the Last Days" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7610PD.mp3>)

11.4. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BELIEVER DIES, EXACTLY?

One of the most famous passages of Scripture on this topic is when the thief on the cross next to Jesus confessed his guilt and prayed, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." Jesus responded, "Today you will be with Me in paradise" (see Luke 23:42-43). Through this promise, Jesus revealed that our souls will instantly be with Him the moment we die. This truth is an everlasting joy to embrace.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup over flows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23:4-6)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What special comfort does Jesus' promise to a criminal who came to faith hours before his death offer someone who is struggling with guilt over the way he/she lived?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Death, Then What?" (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=19975>) is a video-based study with written study guide that examines this issue at length.
- *What Happens When I Die?* (booklet, <http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#11.4>)
- "What Will Happen When I Die?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8011PD.mp3>)
- "The State of the Soul After Death" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7444PD.mp3>)

11.5. ALL THIS TALK ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD AND FUTURE JUDGMENT SOUNDS SCARY. SHOULD I BE AFRAID?

That depends on your faith. If you regret your sins now, and trust in God's forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, there is no need to fear the end of the world. That day will be a day of great joy because our Savior Jesus returns to restore creation and all believers!

(Jesus said) "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (Matthew 25:31-34)

By having faith in Christ there is nothing to lose and everything to gain by Jesus returning at the end of time. This is why Christians may be heard occasionally saying something like "Lord, come quickly." He will bring an end to all the pain, suffering and sin we must endure in this world, which gives way to an eternal life with God, with everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Should Christians Fear Judgment Day?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7629PD.mp3>)

11.6. WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR?

Those who reject Christ will receive eternal punishment in hell. This is why Christians feel so strongly about sharing the Good News of Jesus, so as many as possible can be spared from hell.

Then He (the King) will say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41)

Bodily death is a result of sin. The spirit of an unbeliever leaves the body at death and suffers the everlasting pain and torment of hell, as it awaits Jesus' return on Judgment Day, when the body will be resurrected and reunited with the soul to suffer in hell forever.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)

It can be difficult to accept that a loving God would punish His creatures so horribly. But the Bible is absolutely straightforward about it; it leaves no room for doubt, or wishful thinking. God is absolutely holy and just. He demonstrated His grace and love by providing a Savior from that torment. But when a person for whom Christ died rejects the way of salvation, then God justly condemns him or her to the eternal punishment of hell.

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses (the Ten Commandments) dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:28-31)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- The temptation to dismiss God's warning about hell is eerily similar to the first sin of mankind. God sternly warned Adam about eating the forbidden fruit: "In the day you eat of it you shall surely die" (see Genesis 2:17). Satan directly contradicted God's warning, "You will not surely die" (see Genesis 3:4). Eve believed Satan, and death has plagued mankind ever since. What is the similarity between "you will not surely die" and "there is no such thing as hell"?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "How Can a Loving God Send Anyone to Hell?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7741PD.mp3>)
- "Who Goes to Hell?" [Part 1] (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7725PD.mp3>) [Part 2] (<http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7726PD.mp3>)

11.7. WHEN IS MY ETERNAL DESTINY DECIDED?

It is decided by the state of faith or unbelief at the moment of death. After death there is no opportunity for changing one's condition, no second probation, no further offer of grace and forgiveness. For the resurrected dead, the last judgment is simply the grand finale of this present world. Their eternal destiny was already pronounced individually at the moment of their death. At the last judgment that sentence will be publicly confirmed and extended to the resurrected body also. He who continues in the faith unto the end has nothing to fear for his soul after death, nor for his body and soul on the Day of Judgment.

(Jesus said) "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."
(Mark 16:16)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does the fixing of our eternal fate at the moment of death underscore the importance of laying hold of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ now and not waiting for a future date?

11.8. SO IF I BELIEVE IN JESUS, WILL MY BODY REALLY RISE FROM THE GRAVE?

Yes! We repeat this promise of God at every worship service through one of the ancient Christian statements of faith (creeds). This is also why Jesus is often referred to as the *"firstborn of the dead"* (see Revelation 1:5). The truth is every single person will rise from the dead—believer and unbeliever alike. Believers will be received into the joy of heaven, but the future for the risen unbeliever is the opposite.

(Jesus said) "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28-29)

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21)

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)

11.9. WILL I HAVE A BODY IN HEAVEN?

Genesis describes the Garden of Eden as a place where Adam and Eve walked and talked in the presence of God in a physical world. The Bible describes the new heavens and new earth very much like that—a glorious physical place where we will live with our resurrected bodies.

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"... So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown (buried in the ground) is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. (1 Corinthians 15:35, 42-43)

God describes this perfect world in which we will live forever in both the Old Testament and the New:

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD. (Isaiah 65:17-20a, 25)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:1-5)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How do these passages draw a contrast between our present world and the glorious world Jesus will create when He returns?
- What painful things will be gone from our lives forever?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Questions about Heaven" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7529PD.mp3>)
- "Are the Souls in Heaven Aware of Us on Earth?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7524PD.mp3>)
- "Are There Different Rewards in Heaven?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7411PD.mp3>)

11.10. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO LIVE UNTIL THEN?

With faith in Christ's Word, we are safe no matter if the world ends tomorrow, or we die in a car accident tonight. Therefore, as Christians we can live in joyful expectation of the wonderful things to come, and share our hope with as many who will hear.

(Jesus said) "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10)

And He (Jesus) said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)

DIGGING DEEPER

- If you would like to learn more about the book of Revelation in particular, check out *Explaining All the Scary Stuff in Revelation*, (<http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=13572>) a video-based Bible study.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, by Your suffering and death You have taken away my sins that I might be worthy to stand before Your judgment seat. Guard me in this faith by Your Holy Spirit that I may always be ready for the day of Your returning. Amen.

CHRISTIAN LIFE

Session 12: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, with all You have done for me, teach me how I can live my life for You and for the good of my friends, family, and everyone I meet. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Life with God is something new and wonderful. He has promised to be present with us; His Word blesses us; His sacraments offer us forgiveness that we can taste and touch! Having been "born again" we dedicate our lives entirely to Christ—not to earn His favor, but because we already have it.

12.1. DOES THIS MEAN I WON'T HAVE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES ANYMORE?

The Bible makes it clear that as Christians we should not expect our lives to always be smooth and easy, far from it. Christians have always faced persecution in response to their beliefs. Paul warned the church in Thessalonica to expect trials:

For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. (1 Thessalonians 3:4)

Even Jesus cautioned the disciples to expect persecution in His Name:

(Jesus said) "Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My Word, they will also keep yours." (John 15:20)

But these challenges pale in comparison to the joy of knowing God in this life and the next. His Word gives our lives meaning. His Word gives us comfort. The Christian faith gives an eternal hope!

(Jesus said) "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

12.2. SO WHAT IS MY ROLE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus left us the Great Commission: instructions to spread the Gospel to every nation.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

This direction makes logical sense for pastors, teachers and missionaries, but what about waitresses, mechanics and accountants? It's not always easy for a dentist to share the Good News of Christ while also sharing the bad news that you need a root canal. But our occupation does not stop us from performing our vocation to the best of our God-given abilities. As Christians, we help fulfill the Great Commission by doing the jobs we do in a God-pleasing way and taking every opportunity to bear witness to our faith.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

If you are a husband or wife, treat your spouse as God has instructed. If you run a business, do so honestly, bringing honor to God. If you volunteer serving meals in a homeless shelter, provide your service with a heart filled with love and compassion. We do this so that in all things we are showing ourselves to be ambassadors of Christ and when others see the difference He makes in our lives, they too will seek that same peace for themselves.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How can the hope Christ Jesus gives make you the kind of person other people enjoy being around?
- How is this especially true when Christ is carrying you through difficult struggles in your own life?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "What is Evangelism and Whose Job is It?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8049PD.mp3>)
- "Where are Missionaries These Days?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8045PD.mp3>)

12.3. WHAT ROLE DOES PRAYER PLAY?

Prayer is one of the greatest gifts God has given us: immediate access to speak with Him in both words and thoughts. At any time of the day or night we can turn to God and find Him there, ready to receive our praise, to share our joys, to hear our cries, and to answer us in every situation. What an amazing feeling it is to know that God, the Creator of the universe, loves each one of us enough to invite us to come to Him anytime.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does prayer serve to remind us that God is always present to protect, strengthen and equip us for every situation?

12.4. WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

We should pray because God has instructed us to do so.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Jesus has not only instructed us on how we should pray (see Luke 11:1-13), but He also modeled it for us, demonstrating His own active prayer life at several points throughout the Gospels. Jesus' answer to the disciples' question in Luke 11 is the basis for the Lord's Prayer (<http://www.lcms.org/?pid=1049>), which believers will pray often. But formal prayers in church are not the only way prayers should be offered. We receive great benefits from regularly communicating with God in prayer.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Think of a difficult situation people in your family, church or community are facing today. Discuss how each petition or request of the Lord's Prayer addresses that situation:

- Our Father who art in heaven,
- Hallowed be Thy Name,
- Thy Kingdom come,
- Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
- Give us this day our daily bread;
- And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
- And lead us not into temptation,
- But deliver us from evil.
- For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

12.5. DO I HAVE TO ATTEND WORSHIP?

There may be legitimate reasons we may not be able to worship on a given Sunday. But God did set aside the Third Commandment requiring weekly worship:

(God said) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. ... For in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-10a, 11)

In truth, there is no good reason a Christian would not want to enter the Lord's presence, receive His gifts through the Bible, Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Lord's Supper, and participate in regular fellowship with other believers in worship. We reap the benefits of encouragement, which are both given and received from those with whom we worship.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Why would we ever want to do anything that would separate us from the love of God and the blessings that come from having a strong relationship with Him?

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What part can a church Bible study group play in helping us live a strong Christian life?

12.6. WHAT ARE GOOD WORKS?

Good works (<http://cyclopedia.lcms.org/display.asp?t1=G&word=GOODWORKS>) are all those things that believers think, say and do as a result of their faith in Christ. These are actions done for the good of others and the glory of God. They are not done to bring praise and honor to ourselves. With our hearts set upon God and His will for our lives, we are moved to serve Him through serving others.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Serving others, even believers, is not always easy or pleasant. How does it help when we keep focused on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ?

12.7. DO I NEED TO PERFORM GOOD WORKS?

Doing good works to earn our salvation? Absolutely not! Works cannot save us, nor do they earn us a spot in heaven. Writing to believers at Ephesus, Paul makes this abundantly clear:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

12.8. SO IF GOOD WORKS DON'T SAVE ME, WHY SHOULD I BOTHER?

The fact that our salvation isn't determined by the number of good deeds we perform on a daily, weekly or annual basis does not mean we should hesitate from doing good. In fact, our faith in Christ should naturally fill us with such love and gratitude that we can't help producing good works in response to the great blessings we have received from God.

Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (James 2:18b)

The Bible also reveals numerous blessings and rewards that will be given to those who perform good works, even to those people who are not deserving of them.

(Jesus said) "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." (Luke 6:35)

As Jesus showed, when we are walking closely with our God, we won't always notice the good deeds we are doing. But God remembers each and every one.

(Jesus said) "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:37-40)

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Why Can't I Keep Improving My Spiritual Performance?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8048PD.mp3>)
- Check out free, downloaded booklets from **Project Connect** (<http://www.lhm.org/projectconnect/booklets.asp>) for resources related to the Christian life.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive me all my sins, and strengthen me to love You with all my heart, mind, soul and strength and to love my neighbor as myself. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.