

growing disciples

discipleship in the New Testament

SIX-SESSION BIBLE STUDY ON LUKE-ACTS

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INTRODUCTION

“What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?”

This study will seek to base an answer on the way Jesus interacted with his first disciples. We will focus on Jesus’ interaction with his disciples as it is revealed by the physician, Luke, in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. In these sessions we will look at both the way the disciples first came to follow and how they grew in their relationship with Jesus.

The purpose of this study is to go beyond simply understanding Jesus’ ministry with his earliest followers. The goal is to look at our own discipleship in light of Jesus’ relationship with his first disciples. Even more, we want to discover how that relationship can grow in depth and practice as we follow Jesus. An added value of this study is that it may help you also look at, evaluate and perhaps even change the way new disciples enter and are nurtured toward discipleship and membership in your congregation.

The call to discipleship is an invitation to journey with Jesus. This journey involves many steps. As disciples follow, they move from an early childlike relationship with Jesus to a deeper commitment of faith and practice. Like a toddler’s first tentative steps, the disciples’ walk is not always predictable or necessarily in one direction. Some steps move the disciple forward, some backward, and some may not seem like directional steps at all. While there is a sense of progression to this journey called discipleship, it is important not to get stuck in “step language.”

The six sessions of this study invite you to a deeper walk with Jesus through an examination of six key components of discipleship — *Followers, Learners, Ministers, Living Examples, Witnesses, and Leaders*. As we work through this study, we will want to recognize the progression as one that leads to deeper levels of commitment. At the same time, we want to affirm the winsome work of the Holy Spirit, who always seems to delightfully surprise us by inviting people into the journey at different places along the way. As you move through this study, you will be invited to open yourself to the power of the Spirit, working through the Word, to move you along your journey toward maturity in your relationship to Jesus as his disciple.

This study does not present a “canned” program. Rather, it is designed to help you see Jesus’ direction for every disciple — and for you. It is meant to help congregations develop new strategies that will help all members move toward becoming faithful disciples and leaders in the church of Jesus Christ. As we move on this journey, we have to be willing to sometimes lose our balance, sometimes take steps that are less than perfect. We may even fall along the way. But as we journey together, as we grow by the power of the Spirit, we will be more able to become what Jesus is calling us to be — *disciples*. We are “Little Christs,” as Luther saw it; those who are willing to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

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GOALS FOR THIS COURSE

Through this course and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will:

- Engage the Word (especially in Luke and Acts) as it reveals how Jesus' followers moved from being new partners to becoming maturer disciples.
- Hear and respond to Jesus' invitation to follow and to move into a commitment of growth in discipleship.
- Consider the implications of the invitation to strengthening the discipleship ministry of your congregation as it reaches out to and includes new believers.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- *Making Disciples* is the central mission of the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus' final instruction and command in the Gospel of Matthew is "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 lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Every other ministry we attempt depends on our faithfulness in fulfilling this first command.
- The Gospels tell the story of Jesus "making" disciples. Through his interaction with the first disciples, he gave us the model for how people are invited to become disciples and grow in their discipleship.
- The way Jesus brought his followers into mature discipleship has several key components. Those six key components are: *Followers, Learners, Ministers, Living Examples, Witnesses, and Leaders*.

As we understand how Jesus called and led his first disciples, we can follow that journey to renew our own discipleship and use it as a model for how people are invited to grow in discipleship within our own faith communities. The goal of this study is to move us to action. Jesus has called us to "go and make disciples." The call is urgent. Jesus invites you to move forward toward maturity in your life as a disciple so that you can be all that Jesus meant you to be. As you live out your discipleship and as you work with others in your congregation, you can continue to invite others into the joyful journey of a growing relationship with Jesus.

NOTES TO THE LEADER

As leader, you play an important role in this study. You will be responsible to plan the sessions, make sure resources are available to participants, guide the discussion in order to cover the material, encourage participation by all, help summarize learning, and help to carry through on any possible actions that may arise from your study. You do not need to be a pastor or church professional to lead this study—but some previous experience in leading small group studies will be helpful.



A U D I E N C E

The course is meant to help congregational leaders and members come together to study Scripture in order to grow in their own discipleship and to look at how people grow in discipleship in your congregation. Any group of youth and/or adults in the congregation could benefit from this study. The most productive study, however, might be done by those who have responsibility for discipleship in your congregation — congregation council, education and/or evangelism committee and others.

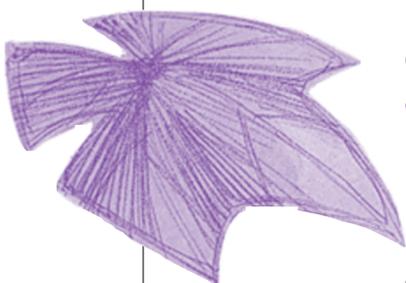
P R E P A R A T I O N

- Be sure you make a copy of this guide for each participant. Making these available before your first session and encouraging all to read through the guide ahead of time can enrich your discussion.
- You might assign one person to lead opening and closing prayers or worship.
- You might assign a session to individual participants (or participants working in pairs). Encourage participants to become as familiar as possible with the material they have been assigned. They might do additional research on the ideas in the session, using commentaries or other study resources. They might write or summarize their discoveries in their own words, interview people in the congregation about the discipleship issues raised in the session, write discussion questions relating to the session, or bring someone who is an “expert” in the area that the session covers to your class session.
- Invite the pastor, congregational leaders, or others who could enrich your discussion, especially during specific sessions.

T H E S E S S I O N P L A N

This course is designed to be done in six consecutive sessions of 60-90 minutes each. If you are working with 60 minutes or less, you will find more material in each session than you can cover. Choose those items that seem most important for your discussion during your class session. Encourage participants to read over, think through and discuss with others the remaining materials between the sessions.

- Don't try to discuss every question. Choose those that seem important for your group. Don't press for “right” answers. Encourage all to express their insights and understanding.
- Return often to the focus of the session — the key component of discipleship. Help participants come to a better insight about how they are living out that discipleship component in their own lives.
- Keep the tone of the study encouraging. The purpose of the study is not to shame people into acting more like a disciple or to make them feel guilty over failed attempts in the past. Through this study, participants should be encouraged to open themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit and to rededicate themselves to living as a disciple in ways that connect with their own lives. Not everyone will come to the same understandings, make the same commitments or carry through in the same way. Our task is to encourage one another in our discipleship journey.



T H E S E S S I O N P L A N *continued*

Each session follows this pattern:

- FOCUS The key theme for the session.
- PRAYER Use the prayer suggestions or other petitions from the group. Take turns leading the prayers for each session.
- OPENING DISCUSSION The questions in this section will help start a conversation and move participants into the focus of the session. If you have more than 6-8 participants, you may want to break into smaller groups to reflect on the questions. If time is short, you may want to select only one or two of the questions, or you may want to develop a question that is even more appropriate for your setting.
- SEARCHING SCRIPTURE In this section you will find a way to study the Scripture passages at the heart of the lesson. Move through this material one section at a time, reading the Scripture texts, reading and reflecting on the material in this guide, and talking about the questions as you have time.
- KEY COMPONENT OF DISCIPLESHIP By naming and defining each component, participants will be able to evaluate their own journeys as disciples. You might also use the definition to evaluate the way your congregation provides opportunities and encouragement for each person to grow as a disciple.
- MOVING TOWARD ACTION This section invites the question, “So what?” What difference does it make to know and understand this material? What needs to change in my own life? How will our study group change as a result of this discovery? What needs to change in our corporate ministry as a congregation to insure our ability to “make disciples” and lead others into this dynamic, life-transforming process?
- CLOSING Pray each week for the Holy Spirit to bring clarity of understanding to the process of discipleship. Pray for participants as individuals, the study group and your congregation. Pray for courage and strength to make the needed changes that become obvious as a result of the study.
- PREPARING FOR THE NEXT SESSION Each week participants will be asked to read biblical material for the next session. They will also be asked to reflect on a carefully chosen quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his book *The Cost of Discipleship*.

*“When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate humanity from all human dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience.... But does this mean that we ignore the seriousness of his commands? Far from it. We can only achieve perfect liberty and enjoy fellowship with Jesus when his command, his call to absolute discipleship, is appreciated in its entirety.” (The Cost of Discipleship, Introduction, p. 37) **

**Note: Some of Bonhoeffer's quotes selected for this study have been altered to be more gender inclusive.*



session one

The invited become followers

FOCUS At its heart, discipleship is a series of relationships. The first relationship is the disciple's relationship with Jesus. The second focus is the relationship between disciples. The final relationship that must be included in any New Testament study of discipleship is the relationship of the disciples to others. Each relationship begins the same way: with an invitation and a response.

PRAYER *Lord Jesus, as we consider how you began a relationship with your first disciples, help us to remember how our relationship with you began. We thank you for counting us worthy to be your disciples today, and for placing us in this fellowship of disciples in this congregation and especially with those with whom we will share this study. We ask that your Holy Spirit would be at work opening our hearts and minds so that we might understand clearly how you made disciples and continue to make disciples today. May your Word bring us new insight and renewal. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

O P E N I N G D I S C U S S I O N *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- What is your definition of "disciple"? What does the word mean to you right now?
- What does it mean to you to say that discipleship is at heart a relationship?
- Talk about your style of forming relationships: Are you a person who offers the first word or one who waits until another person comes to you?
- How do you handle rejection when you try to approach someone to begin a relationship and they do not respond?

S E A R C H I N G S C R I P T U R E *Read Luke 5: 1-11 and 27-29 aloud.*

1. Jesus had been preaching to the crowds, but the process of discipleship begins with a focus on an individual. In the first case, the focus was on Peter and in the second example, it was Matthew. *What is the significance of the fact that in each case Jesus made the approach, rather than the other way around?*
2. In his calling of Peter, Jesus first issues a command: "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." *How do you think Peter received that command? Why do you think he did what Jesus commanded? In what way was this Peter's first step in becoming a disciple?*
3. Peter expresses his sense of being overwhelmed by Jesus' attention and care. But Jesus prevents Peter's retreat with an even greater invitation. "Don't be afraid, from now on you will be catching people." *What did Jesus mean by that invitation? What was the result of that invitation for Peter?*
4. Jesus called Matthew (Levi), a hated Roman tax collector. Though he was ostracized by fellow Jews, he had received power and authority from the Romans. He had financial security and protection. *Why is Matthew an unlikely candidate for an invitation?*
5. Again, Jesus approaches. "Follow me," he says. *What do you think Matthew might have thought as Jesus invited him? What did Matthew do?*

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6. Jesus did not call his disciples to come and merely observe, nor did he abandon them once a relationship was begun. He called them to walk and stay with him. *Based on your study so far, what does it mean to be called and to live as a disciple?*

7. The setting for the calling of the first disciples is one that develops over the first four chapters in the Gospel of Luke. As you examine those chapters for next week, you will discover again the amazing things that occurred prior to Jesus calling his first followers. *Watch for the following pattern as you read.*

Jesus' model for calling disciples includes:

- Focusing on individuals
- Approaching them directly
- Conversation that is sensitive to their needs
- Invitation or offer to follow
- Opportunity for obedient response
- Response of amazement and wonder that invites others into the journey

What does this pattern say about Jesus and his disciples? What does it say about your call to be a disciple?

K E Y C O M P O N E N T O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

Discipleship begins with Jesus calling us into a relationship with him, inviting us to be his disciples and challenging us to respond with an act of obedience.

- Jesus has offered this invitation — not to agree with an idea or set of teachings, not to join an institution or organization. Jesus invites disciples to himself. There is only one thing that attracts people. It is the one who issues the call: Jesus. Therefore, the call of Jesus is first and foremost an exclusive attachment to Jesus. *How do we as individuals and as a congregation offer that call?*

- The call to discipleship is a call to a relationship with the living Christ. The call is freely given and the response is an act of faith. Faith is described in these texts as a matter of taking, by the power of the Spirit, the first step of obedience in following Jesus. The response is the evidence of faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, *“Unless a definite step is demanded, the call vanishes into thin air and if people imagine that they can follow Jesus without taking this step, they are deluding themselves like fanatics.”* Faith is inseparable from obedience. Whenever the call is made and the response is one of obedience, the Spirit has worked faith. *What does the close connection between faith and obedience say about your faith life? What does it mean for the way the invitation is offered to others through you and through your congregation? What does it mean to you to live the “obedience of faith”?*



M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N *Do or discuss one or more of the following:*

- Tell how you received the call from Jesus. What did that call have to do with your baptism? Your confirmation promise? What was personal about that call?
- How do you show obedience to Jesus in your life? How can others tell you are following Jesus now?
- How do we offer invitations to other people to meet Jesus?
- Talk about the difference between inviting people to join an institution and the invitation to a relationship with Jesus.
- How are new disciples called, invited, supported and assisted in their relationship with Jesus and on their journey as disciples in your congregation? What might be done to make that invitation and support more effective?

C L O S I N G T H I S S E S S I O N

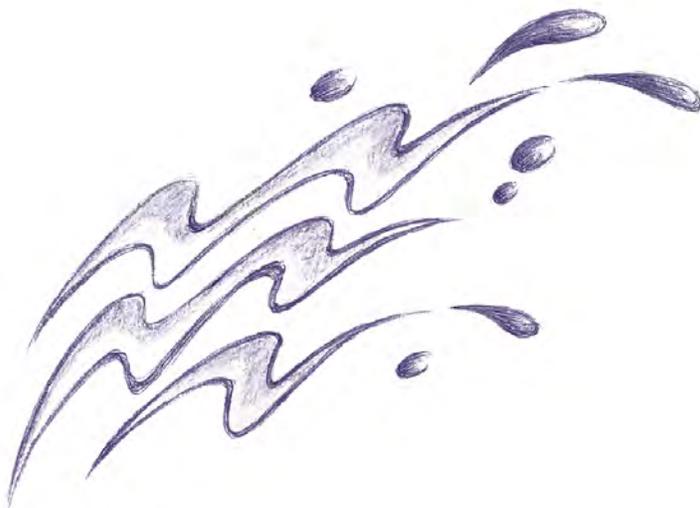
Those who are hearing Jesus' call to follow him for the first time might make a commitment to respond to that call through prayer and by continuing to study the Word. Members of the group might pray for and lay hands on those making that commitment and promise to be with them throughout the study. Others could share and pray for help with things in their lives that need to change as they move toward mature discipleship.

P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

Read Luke, chapters 1-8. Note the pattern referenced on page 5 of this study guide. Think about the effect created by Jesus' presence, teaching and action. Ask for volunteers to be responsible for the opening and closing prayers for the next session.

"The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus."

(The Cost of Discipleship, p. 57)



session two

f o l l o w e r s b e c o m e l e a r n e r s

FOCUS Disciples mature through basic training — a time for learning the essentials. Jesus is an available and transparent leader. Before disciples can know who they are, they need to know who he is. Only then are they equipped to understand his mission, purpose, methods and expectations.

PRAYER *Pray for wisdom and insight, an openness to learning, growing and being renewed in your relationship with Jesus. Pray for a new sense of personal identity as a disciple of Jesus. Pray for caring attitudes among those who are studying this material together. Pray for your congregation, that others would be open to becoming a congregation committed to a discipleship model for ministry.*

O P E N I N G D I S C U S S I O N

- Describe your most fulfilling experience in working on a team. How would you describe your relationship with the leader?
- What do you count on a leader to do?
- How important are the accomplishments of a leader in determining your level of commitment to a cause?
- What are the benefits of a close, personal relationship with a leader? What can be the downside of that relationship?

S E A R C H I N G S C R I P T U R E *Read Luke 9:18-20 aloud.*

1. The disciples were on hand as Jesus taught the large crowd that had been following him. They had just experienced the feeding of the five thousand with the five loaves and two fish they offered to him and watched him bless. *What do you think the crowds were talking about after the feeding? What might they have been saying about Jesus?*
2. After a time of prayer, Jesus asks them a leading question: “Who do the crowds say that I am?” *What are the answers?*
3. Jesus asks, “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?” *Why is that the single most important question a disciple of Jesus can answer? How would you answer that question? Where would your answer come from?*

4. We will look at what the Word reveals concerning the identity of Jesus. (You might divide into smaller discovery teams to share the exploration of these 14 biblical references.) The question to be answered, after investigating each text, is: *“What does this tell us about who Jesus is?”* Write your responses and share them with the group.

- Luke 1:30-33 Announcement of his birth (*Who is he?*)
- Luke 2:8-12 Proclamation to the shepherds (*Who is he?*)
- Luke 3:21-22 A voice at his baptism (*Who is he?*)
- Luke 4:13 Confronting evil (*Who is he able to face and resist?*)
- Luke 4:17-21 A prophesy (*Who does Jesus claim to be?*)
- Luke 4:34-37 A word from the demons (*Who do they say he is?*)
- Luke 5:18-26 He has power to heal and forgive (*Who can do that?*)
- Luke 6:5 He is Lord of the Sabbath (*Who is he?*)
- Luke 6:20-49 The teaching about the Kingdom (*What is life like in the Kingdom of God?*)

- Luke 7:11-17 His Word brings life to the dead (*Who is he?*)
- Luke 7:40-50 *What does Jesus say about forgiveness and faith?*
- Luke 8:4-15 *How are we to live a productive life?*
- Luke 8:21 *What does Jesus expect of those who are close to him?*
- Luke 8:22-25 *Who is able to stop the winds and the waves?*

K E Y C O M P O N E N T O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

Disciples learn the basics.

1. The disciples begin to learn, through experience and explanation, who Jesus is and his mission — a mission that includes every disciple. Jesus deepens the relationship with his disciples by revealing to them the truth of his identity. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. He is “God with us.” *How has your understanding of who Jesus is deepened over time? What is the significance of being able to say that Jesus is God’s Messiah?*
2. All who follow Jesus as a disciple need to learn the basics. Only by knowing who Jesus is can we accept his power and his authority. Once we know and accept who Jesus is, we can grow in our ability to trust and follow him. *What does our need to know Jesus and his power have to do with our need to study the Word? How do you as an individual and we as a congregation engage in “basic training?” What could be strengthened or revitalized personally, corporately?*
3. The basics of discipleship offer us a new view of reality. Through the process of learning and observing, disciples begin to glimpse what Jesus was revealing: the Kingdom of God. *What does that new reality have to do with our lives right now?*
4. In accepting this new view of life, we are also leaving something else behind. It is the way we used to view life. This is the beginning of the process of exchanging one view of reality for another. It should come as no surprise that such a change will also include changes in behavior, attitude, habits, self-understanding, motives, etc. *What are some of those changes as you experience them?*
5. Luther expressed the basics in this way: “Christ Alone,” “Word Alone,” Faith Alone,” and “Grace Alone.” *What do those phrases mean to you? Why are they important as we seek to know who Jesus is and who we are as disciples?*

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M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N *Talk about one or more of the following:*

What implications do these have for your life and the life of your congregation?

1. How confident can you be about your basic training? Did you miss some of the fundamentals? What? How can you “catch up”?
2. How well are members of our congregation trained in the basics of discipleship? What classes do we offer to review the basics?
3. What opportunities for learning do we offer? What groups are being served? Which are being missed? How can we reach more with opportunities to learn?
4. What kind of learning opportunities do we offer for those new to the congregation or those new to the faith? What might they be looking for? What more could we do?

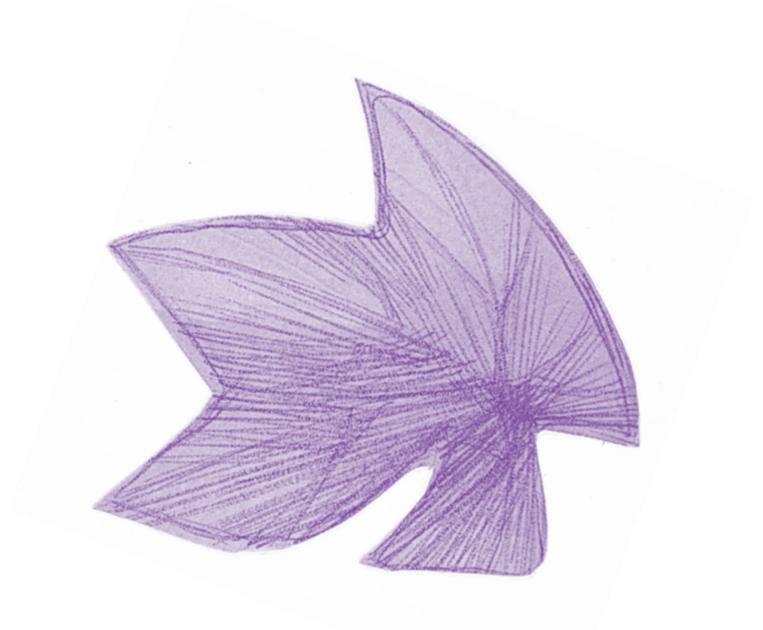
C L O S I N G T H I S S E S S I O N

Thank God for calling you to be Jesus’ disciples. Give thanks for the opportunity this study offers to grow and be strengthened in your faith. Invite those who have come to new insights to share them. Let those who may be struggling or who have some confusion ask for support and openness to the teaching and guidance of the Spirit. Pray for the Spirit’s strength to carry through on the changes you think Jesus is inviting you to consider for your congregation as you invite and teach new disciples.

P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

Read Chapters 9-10 in the Gospel of Luke. Make a list of all the ministries of which you are aware currently underway through your congregation. Ask for volunteers to lead the prayers for the next session.

“The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus), ... out of the realm of the finite (which is in truth infinite) into the realm of infinite possibilities (which is the one liberating reality).” (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 58)



session three

L e a r n e r s b e c o m e m i n i s t e r s

FOCUS The disciples were given basic training by knowing Jesus and understanding his mission. The vision of the Kingdom of God Jesus presented, and Jesus' teaching about the nature of that Kingdom, became real and tangible for the disciples as they observed his ministry. Then Jesus sent the disciples out to do exactly what he was doing. The process is the same for Jesus' present-day disciples.

PRAYER Invite the Holy Spirit to be present and to open your hearts and minds so you can receive new insights and understandings. Encourage each other to give the Holy Spirit access to your will so you will also be open to new ways of acting, doing and speaking. Give thanks for each of the ministries of your congregation. Give thanks for the people involved in offering those ministries and those who are served. Ask for guidance to strengthen existing ministries and for opportunities to begin new ministries that will reach even more people.

O P E N I N G D I S C U S S I O N *Talk about the following:*

- Tell about a time when you participated in a service project or helping experience. What did you do? How were you mentored? Who did it help? Why was it meaningful for you?
- What authority or power did you have to accomplish your goal? How did you receive that authority? Did you know the people you were helping?
- How important is it for you to make a difference in this world? When you see people in need, what happens to your heart? What happened to your relationships with the people with whom you were working?

S E A R C H I N G S C R I P T U R E *Read Luke 9:1-6 and Luke 10:1-20 aloud.*

1. Jesus had been modeling ministry for the disciples. At first they were passive observers. Yet they were not observing from a distance. They were close enough to see and hear Jesus' method and the results as he preached, taught, healed and performed miracles. The revealing of his power was for the purpose of giving it away. *What do you think caused the disciples to stay with Jesus over the years of his ministry?*
2. Jesus calls his disciples together and then gives them power to heal, to drive out demons and to preach. *What were the disciples to do with the power or authority Jesus gave them?*
3. They are given specific instructions for this mission. The one giving the power and authority also sets the boundaries. *What are the boundaries? Why are they helpful?*
4. Having all they needed, the disciples responded obediently. They went out and preached and healed. As they did so, they experienced the power of Jesus they had observed in him. Now they were touching the lives of people with his power. Through them, people heard about the Kingdom of God and began to experience God's reign in Jesus. *How do you think the disciples were received?*

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5. The disciples stayed together, but moved from place to place just as Jesus had directed them. *Why was their report back to Jesus a cause for celebration?*

6. In Luke 10:1-20, Jesus increases the number of disciples who are on the mission. *What was that mission? How was Jesus a model for that mission? Why do the 72 return filled with joy?*

7. Notice that Jesus' model for empowering people for ministry includes:

- Giving people power, authority and promise
- Sending them with a purpose
- Setting boundaries for the mission

As they carry out the mission, the disciples:

- Experience the power of Jesus through them to others
- Stay together
- Report and celebrate the results

What does that model say about the way we are to carry out mission both individually and as a congregation?

K E Y C O M P O N E N T O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

Jesus sends his disciples out to do ministry in his name. The power and authority of Jesus they observed is now given to them.

1. Another change occurs in the life of the disciples as they make the transition from observing Jesus and his ministry to participating in that ministry. Certainly, their experiences and learning helped them mature in their faith in Jesus. Beyond that, they also grew in their relationships with one another. *What evidence of that growing relationship do you see?*

2. The disciples also grow in their relationship with those outside their group. Though it would have been easy to remain insiders and observers, Jesus sends them out to interact with others. They are called to become doers of the Word and not hearers only. *Had Jesus asked if they thought they were ready for this next step, how do you think they would have responded?* It was by following obediently that they learned the greatest lessons. *What does that truth say about our growth as disciples?*

3. The power of Jesus for healing, renewing and changing lives is available to every disciple today. It is to be used for the same purpose to reach others with the Gospel: to heal lives, to change circumstances and to overcome evil. Jesus brings the Spirit into the life of every disciple. *What is the purpose of that indwelling Spirit? How does the Spirit ready us for the mission?*

4. Today, the need for healing and proclamation is just as great as it was when Jesus sent out those first disciples. Ministry with power happens when we are sent out to address the needs of others. *If Jesus were standing here today, where would he be sending you and your congregation to preach, teach and heal?*



M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N *Do or discuss one or more of the following:*

- In what ministries have you observed the power of Jesus at work in your congregation or in the larger Christian community?
- How many ministries in your congregation are designed to reach out to others? What percentage of your congregation is actively involved in those ministries? How many are still in the stands watching?
- How do we heal and proclaim today? Who are the people in your community who need healing and need to hear the Gospel of Jesus? What are their hurts and illnesses?
- How do you begin new ministries? How can people be encouraged to move from the stands to action? How can they be empowered, given authority, trained, sent, encouraged, then report and celebrate the results?
- Design a team of disciples and a method to address the concerns of a group of people in your community who need your care. Who could you put on the team? How does Jesus equip you for that ministry? What gifts does he give?

C L O S I N G T H I S S E S S I O N

Those who may have been on the sidelines are invited to take action. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has been prompting you to get involved in a particular ministry. Pray for those who choose to be involved in ministry. Pray for new ministries designed to reach new people with the love of Jesus and the good news of his Gospel. Pray for obedient hearts among the members of your congregation and a willingness to respond to Jesus' call to go and do ministry in his name. Pray for a vision of ministry among your leadership that affirms the growth and development of new ministries for the purpose of reaching new people. Give thanks for all you have received from Jesus during this study.

P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

Reread Chapters 9-10; read Chapters 11-14 in the Gospel of Luke. Think about what you find most challenging in the Scripture passages you are reading and make a list of those challenges. Think about the most important role models in your life. Come prepared to identify them and discuss why they have had such a positive impact on your life.

"The idea of a situation in which faith is possible is only a way of stating the facts of a case in which the following two propositions hold good and are equally true: only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes."

(The Cost of Discipleship, p. 63)



session four

Ministers become living examples

FOCUS Disciples who have experienced the power of Jesus at work through them for the sake of others are challenged to accept that same power to make needed changes in their own lives. These personal changes flow from a relationship with Jesus that continues to deepen and grow more intimate. Disciples are challenged to integrate their relationship to Jesus into every aspect of their lives — a commitment that involves dedication to new faith practices.

PRAYER Invite the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and minds to insight and wisdom. Pray for changed wills and new behaviors that give expression to a growing commitment to Jesus. Pray for the relationship with Jesus to be renewed and deepened. Give thanks for spiritually mature people in your congregation. Ask the Spirit to teach you through the example of their visible commitment and lifestyle.

OPENING DISCUSSION *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- Tell about a project you took part in that grew as it was being completed — one change led to additional changes. What was the project and what were the results?
- Tell about a project you began and realized that the project had quickly exceeded your expertise. What did you do then? Did you call in the experts to finish it for you, or find some other way to increase your skill?
- Name those who are or have been important examples or role models for your life? Why do you respect them and desire to follow their example? What qualities do they possess?
- What was the most challenging thing you have ever been asked to do as a disciple of Jesus? How did you deal with that challenge?
- Is there a difference between the way Jesus challenged his followers and the way we challenge disciples today? How would you describe that difference?

SEARCHING SCRIPTURE *Read Luke 9:18-26; 46-62 aloud.*

1. Only by knowing Jesus intimately, understanding who he is, observing the power of his love to transform lives, and allowing his love to flow through our lives in ministry to others are we prepared for the rest of the story. Jesus tells his disciples first what he will experience: suffering, rejection, death, and then resurrection. *The obvious question is if that is what is in store for him, what should his disciples expect? What does it mean to you to “bear a cross”? How does “bearing the cross” fit with today’s expectations of the “good life”?*
2. Jesus invited his followers to be bold in their proclamation of who he is. As they followed him, they were introduced into the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught them about the nature and characteristics of that Kingdom. The question was, were they ready to live in the greater reality of that Kingdom? The world view of this Kingdom of God is dramatically different from our own. *How is Jesus’ definition of “greatness” different? How is competition handled in the Kingdom? What do those differences mean to us as we seek to live in Jesus’ Kingdom?*

3. Choose other portions of this season's reading for this session that also demonstrate the more difficult and demanding aspects of being a disciple. *How is living in the Kingdom different from living in the world?*

4. *What does it mean to say that who we are as disciples is demonstrated by how we live? How do these texts demonstrate that truth? What does it mean for you to live as a "visible" disciple of Jesus? In what way can that be a cross? In what way is it a privilege?*

K E Y C O M P O N E N T O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

The disciples become living examples and role models as they grow in their relationship with Jesus.

1. Jesus challenges his disciples with a new view of reality called the Kingdom of God. The invitation is to live in the reality of his Kingdom now. As disciples accept the deeper demands of this call, their lives are completely transformed and become integrated into a wholeness that is possible only through Jesus. This freedom is only through obedience to Jesus and all he commands. Such a transformed life becomes a model for others. *What does the transformed life mean to you? In what way have you been a model for others? How have others been a model for you?*

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, *"To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after. It is not as though we had to imitate him as well as we could. We cannot transform ourselves into his image; it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19), and to be manifested in us. Christ's work in us is not finished until he has perfected his own form in us. We must be assimilated to the form of Christ in its entirety, the form of Christ incarnate, crucified and glorified."* (*Cost of Discipleship*, p. 301) *How can an intentional focus on transformation best happen in your congregation? What do small groups and the study of the Word have to do with that transformation?*

3. There are seven major "faith practices" that are a part of the "Call to Discipleship." They are important to look at here because they are essential lifestyle practices of the transformed disciple.

PRAY This is the foundation for transformation because it is the way to a close and growing relationship with Jesus.

STUDY Immersion in the Word opens the disciple to the work of the Spirit through the Word — a work that offers direction and challenge for the disciple's way.

WORSHIP Every disciple seeks to be nurtured through regular encounters with God. Worship happens both within the community of faith and in one's private devotional life.

INVITE Disciples live out their commitment to give away what they have received from Jesus by inviting others to come, follow, learn, and become involved in ministry.

ENCOURAGE Disciples care for one another by offering spiritual encouragement to others.

SERVE As disciples follow Jesus, they are forced out into the world to address the hurts of others with the power of God's love and compassion.

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GIVE Disciples give the gifts they have received. As we give for the sake of Jesus and his Kingdom, we learn to give up one reality and embrace the reality of the Kingdom. Disciples at this point can distinguish the difference between the world view that Jesus offers and their own western, materialistic, individualistic, rational world view with all its self-seeking values, and more intentionally embrace the one Jesus offers.

How are these practices evident in your life? How have they shaped you? How have they opened you to the work of the Spirit? How can you rededicate yourself to a lifestyle and world view that comes from your relationship to Jesus?

M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N Do or discuss one or more of the following:

- Identify those in your congregation who demonstrate their discipleship in the practices mentioned above. How can you make use of these spiritually mature disciples as mentors and teachers?
- Write a plan for yourself that emphasizes the spiritual disciplines: prayer, study, worship, service, giving, inviting and encouraging. Share your plan with others.
- List your barriers to living the life of the disciple. Share the list with one or two others. Talk about where you can find support and assistance.
- Describe the major differences between our cultural world view and a biblical or Kingdom world view? How does that difference most affect you?
- Describe your own experience with “cross bearing” and “self-denial.” In what ways has your experience with these transformed you as you have followed Jesus? How has this experience been a witness to others?
- What kind of discipleship training and support do you or could you offer in your congregation? Who would lead it and who would be willing to participate? How might you be a part of that learning and growth?

C L O S I N G T H I S S E S S I O N

Pray for the spiritual growth of your congregation. Let the Holy Spirit give you a vision for what life might be like in your congregation with the majority of your people reaching this level of spiritual maturity. Sense both the excitement and the challenges of this part of Jesus’ plan of discipleship. Pray that Jesus will prepare the hearts of people in your congregation to accept this challenge.

P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

Read from Luke, Chapter 15, through Acts, Chapter 2. In these chapters, look for Jesus’ passionate concern for those who do not know him or his love. Think about the most important Good News we have as Christians to share. Briefly write down your understanding of that Good News. Try to find ways to share that Good News with others. Bring your written statements to the next session to share.

“The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death — we give over our lives to death. When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die.” (p. 89) “But if we lose our lives in his service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ.” (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 91)

session five

Living examples become witnesses

FOCUS Disciples who are living transformed lives are equipped to be powerful witnesses. They reach out to others in their community and support the outreach of the church to the world. Disciples of Jesus understand the heart of Jesus for reaching those who have not been touched, healed or transformed by the power of his love and salvation.

PRAYER Join in a prayer in which all take a part. Participants might give thanks for one way in which they have grown as disciples. They might also ask for the one thing they believe they need most for continued growth as a disciple. Take time to remember unreached people in your own family, among your friends, in your neighborhood, city, state, nation and world. Be bold enough to ask the Spirit for a heart transplant: ask that Jesus' heart for reaching people would be planted in yours.

O P E N I N G D I S C U S S I O N *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- Share your written statements about the Good News of Jesus. What does each add? How can your statements be used to witness?
- What is a witness? In the New Testament, the word translated as witness is *martyros*. What does witnessing have to do with being a martyr? Is it easier to be a witness today than it was in biblical times? Why or why not?
- How do you build a relationship with another person? What steps can you identify? What does relationship-building have to do with witnessing?

S E A R C H I N G S C R I P T U R E *Read Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:8, 2:1-6; 22-47*

1. *Tell about some examples of Jesus' passionate concern for reaching people — people like the disciples, like those who were ill, others. The most important indication of Jesus' passionate concern for reaching people is his death on the cross. Why is that death the most profound statement of the value Jesus places on each person's life?*
2. *Every person is of infinite worth and value. Jesus' death marks that value, and his resurrection marks his unswerving purpose to reach the world. Nothing is able to stop his passion to reach every person in the world, nothing in life and nothing in death. What does it mean to you to say that Jesus has offered himself for you? What Good News does that give you to tell?*
3. *Jesus' instructions to the first disciples occurred after the resurrection. Notice the process he recommends. The disciples were to begin right where they were. Then they were to move into more difficult surroundings. He calls them to move farther and farther away from their starting point. The ultimate goal is clear. They are to reach the entire world. How might Jesus give that command to us today?*
4. *However, the disciples are not to make the first move until they have received more power. Jesus instructs them to stay together in the city until the one he promised to send, the Holy Spirit, had come. In the first chapter of Acts (the continuation of the Gospel of Luke), Jesus repeats his instructions just prior to his ascension. What did the disciples need before they would be ready to witness? How did Pentecost equip them for that mission?*

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5. Once the people heard, they began to ask an important question, “What does this mean?” The disciples witnessed, they told the truth about Jesus. By the power of the Spirit, the people responded. They were ready to take the next step. Read Acts 2:37-41 again. *What was the next step? What does Peter’s response mean for our witnessing? How is that response different from “inviting people to church?” What does it mean to be “ready” to witness in this way?*
6. Peter’s sermon is effective because it answers key questions: Who is Jesus? What has he done? Why do you need what only he can give? How can people receive what he offers? *What can we learn about effective witness from Peter’s approach?*
7. God’s free gift of salvation is already complete and offered to all. The steps in that offering were clearly marked by the disciples: Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Then the second gift — the Holy Spirit. In this way the disciples followed Jesus’ example. They gave away what they had just received. *Again, what can we learn about sharing the Gospel from the example of the disciples?*
8. The disciples held onto the new followers by taking them to the next step. They began to teach them. They included them in fellowship events so they could model the lifestyle and values of disciples. They kept them close enough so they could observe the power of Jesus at work through his disciples as they loved and cared for people. The disciples prayed for them. *What does their example mean for how we do evangelism in our congregation?*

K E Y C O M P O N E N T S O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

Disciples are committed to local and world evangelization.

1. Each disciple has a personal testimony to offer as a result of knowing and following Jesus. Each disciple has a story to tell of his/her relationship with Jesus. Each story is similar and unique at the same time. Each one is a witness to the love Jesus offered. Each disciple’s life is a witness to the difference that relationship with Jesus has made. *What is your story to tell? How can you share your story?*
2. Now or at home, take time to put into words the experience of knowing Jesus and what it means to follow him. Think through or write out a personal way to share the Gospel — a way that includes the essential ingredients of the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Then seek to spend some time with nonbelievers. Look for ways to tell your story. *Bring your experiences back to the next session with you.*
3. Evangelism is based on developing a relationship with a person in the name of Jesus. Those who witness don’t simply offer an idea about Jesus and then leave hearers alone. An ongoing relationship helps to insure that the new believer becomes a mature disciple, capable of evangelizing others. *How can your congregation be more effective in reaching others and staying with them as they grow in the faith?*
4. Local evangelism is important, but it is also to be coupled with the rest of Jesus’ command. Jesus’ concern was for every person in the entire world. The mission he gave us was to reach the world. *How do you and your congregation reach the world? What more can you do to make that outreach effective?*

M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N *Do or discuss one or more of the following:*

- Tell about an experience when you talked openly with someone else about your faith. What was the result of that sharing? What did you learn?
- What training in evangelism have you received? What was helpful about that training? How can training be offered to more members of your congregation?
- Do you know any missionaries currently serving in other countries? Share some stories of those missionaries. Contact the Division for Global Mission-ELCA for more information about specific missionaries and how you and your congregation can support them (www.elca.org).
- What are the next steps you need to take as a disciple to become a more effective witness? How can you work together to take those steps? What are the next steps your congregation needs to take to become more effective in witnessing? How can you be a part of those steps?

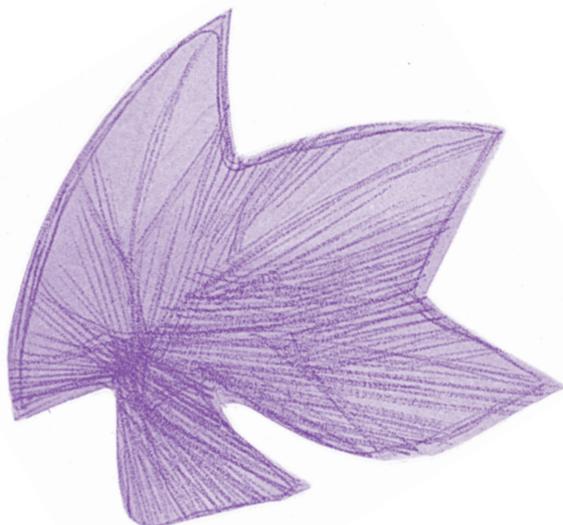
C L O S I N G T H I S S E S S I O N

Offer thanks for specific learnings that seem to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ask for gifts from the Spirit that you need to be more effective evangelists. Pray for the congregation and ask the Holy Spirit to ignite a flame in the heart of each person for reaching those who have not heard or have not come to follow Jesus. Ask for the conviction and the strength to accomplish that mission in name of Jesus.

P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E N E X T S E S S I O N

Read Acts 3 through the end of the book of Acts. Examine these chapters with a focus on the disciples and what they were doing. How would you describe their actions?

“Behold I send you.’ For this is no way to have chosen themselves, no undertaking of their own. It is, in the strict sense of the word, a mission. With this the Lord promises them his abiding presence, even when they find themselves as sheep among wolves, defenseless, powerless, sore pressed and beset with great danger. Nothing can happen to them without Jesus knowing it.” (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 214)



session six

d i s c i p l e s b e c o m e l e a d e r s

FOCUS Jesus' goal in training his first followers as disciples became clear following his death, resurrection and ascension, and the Pentecost events. The disciples had been trained to be the leaders of his church. Their mission was to train and equip others for leadership in the church. This is God's method for reaching the world — disciples as leaders train other leaders who, in turn, carry on the mission.

PRAYER After a quiet time to focus on your hopes and needs, take turns offering words of thanksgiving as you begin. Pray once more for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds so that all will be ready to learn and grow. Pray for wills open to be redirected into living as disciples — as leaders bearing the responsibility and the challenge to lead others.

O P E N I N G D I S C U S S I O N *Talk about one or more of the following:*

- Tell about a time when you were asked to lead. How would you describe that experience? What was the outcome? What did you learn about yourself? About leadership?
- Describe the qualities of a leader you would be willing to follow. What do those qualities mean for us as leaders?
- List some of the dangers to consider when you accept any leadership role. What kind of help can overcome these dangers or barriers?
- Some people say we have a “leadership crisis” in the church today. Agree? Disagree? Why? What might be some solutions?

S E A R C H I N G S C R I P T U R E *Read Acts 6:1-15 aloud.*

1. Even without the physical presence of Jesus, the disciples continued to function as if he were present. They had become leaders and were prepared for this task because of the training Jesus had provided. They were leading by their example even as Jesus had led them by his example. *Share some examples from your reading of the ways in which the disciples continued to do what they had learned from Jesus: preach, teach and heal.*
2. The disciples were forced to handle new problems, like what you do with three thousand new believers. They were forced to solve problems, deal with hostile governments and many complaints from their own community of disciples. They devised a plan to deal with the problem of the distribution of food. *What did the plan show about their priorities?*
2. The disciples sought specific qualities in those who would be leaders. The others accepted the plan and offered a list of candidates. The first disciples prayed and laid hands on those chosen to empower them for this work. *What can we learn from this example about selecting leaders?*
4. These disciples dealt with persecution, adversity, change and an expanding church by equipping and sending others. This same group of disciples sent Paul on the first missionary journey. *What does their example mean for us as we deal with problems? As we seek and train leaders? What outcome can we expect?*



K E Y C O M P O N E N T S O F D I S C I P L E S H I P

God's plan, according to the model we have received from Jesus, is that disciples are trained to lead his church. The call to discipleship is a call to leadership.

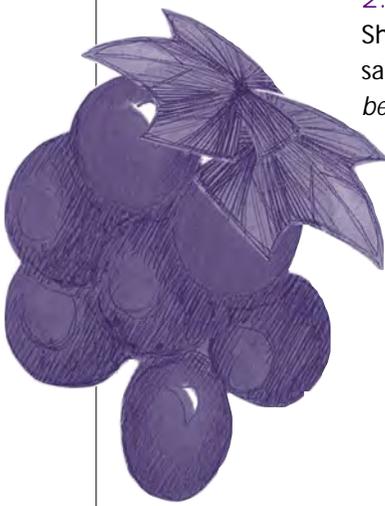
1. What has happened in the church? Why haven't we produced servant leaders who are making a difference in the world? George Barna, in his book *The Second Coming of the Church* lists five thought-provoking reasons:

- First, millions of Christians view transformation in Christ as a one-time solution to a 'crisis' rather than a lifelong process. Jesus has become one more quick fix for our problems.
- Second, and perhaps as a consequence, many believers stop "growing in their faith." Instead of measuring our life against God's standards, we compare ourselves to others and take consolation in being a little better than the next person.
- Third, many Christians have developed a distorted understanding of what constitutes purposeful or successful living. When asked to describe the ends they live for, the top items most American Christians reported were good health, a successful career, a comfortable lifestyle, and a functional family. The average Christian assumes that when we are happy, God is happy.
- Fourth, a large majority of Christians contend that the true meaning of our earthly existence is to simply enjoy life and reap as much fulfillment as we can from our daily pursuits. God provides blessings for the purpose of making us happy. Only a few Christians would say that we are blessed so we can be a blessing to others.
- Finally, Christians are not prepared to fight the good fight of faith. We find greater purpose in living by trying to avoid all struggle. We are products of a culture that values achievement and comfort over sacrifice and suffering. When hardships come we seek deliverance rather than look for ways to serve others who are immersed in even more difficult situations (p. 123-124).

What evidence of these conclusions have you seen?

2. One of the images Jesus used in training his disciples was that of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd cares for the sheep and is willing to risk it all for their sake. *What does it mean to you to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd? What does it mean to be called into that kind of servant leadership?*

to next page



3. There are several characteristics of the servant leader that come from the early church. Servant leaders are:

CALLED We are servants first. It is the one who has authority over us that has called us to do this work. The calling is not to position or title, but to put the best interest of another ahead of self.

CARING Disciples listen and understand. The purpose of such listening is not to criticize, judge and condemn. We listen in a way that offers acceptance so that we can get close enough to demonstrate the love of Jesus.

COMPASSIONATE Disciples are willing to put themselves in the place of another person. The goal is to care enough to help them find hope, gain wisdom, and receive a new life-giving vision.

COMPELLING Disciples can translate needs into goals in a way that demonstrates Jesus' authority. Some people will follow a person, but they will not be transformed until they are convinced, persuaded and compelled to embrace a new direction for themselves.

According to these characteristics, what is the difference between the way the church defines leaders and the way the world defines them? Why the difference? What difference do the right kind of leaders make in the church? In the world?

4. Without Spirit-filled and directed leaders (both lay leaders and professional), the church cannot succeed. *Why? Why is leadership so critical? What can we do to find and nurture effective and in-spirited leaders? How can we continue to grow as leaders?*

M O V I N G T O W A R D A C T I O N *Do or discuss one or more of the following:*

- How do we individually and as a congregation care for our existing leaders? How can we equip and support them more effectively?
- How can we be open to receive new leaders? How can we continue to bring in, train and support new leaders?
- List the opportunities for leadership in your congregation. How can you do a better job of getting the right people into positions of leadership? You might use the "spiritual gifts" inventory as a first step.
- Write an answer to these questions: Am I praying daily for our leaders? Do I see the way that the Spirit is calling me to become a leader? How can I move toward that calling?
- Write a plan for your own growth as a disciple and as a leader in the congregation. What will you do in the areas of prayer, study, worship, witnessing, encouraging, serving and giving as a way to move toward your goal? What will the promises of Jesus and the guidance of the Spirit have to do with your plan? Share your plan with others, if you are willing. Consider ritually offering your plans to God as part of the offering during a public worship service of your congregation.



CLOSING THIS SESSION

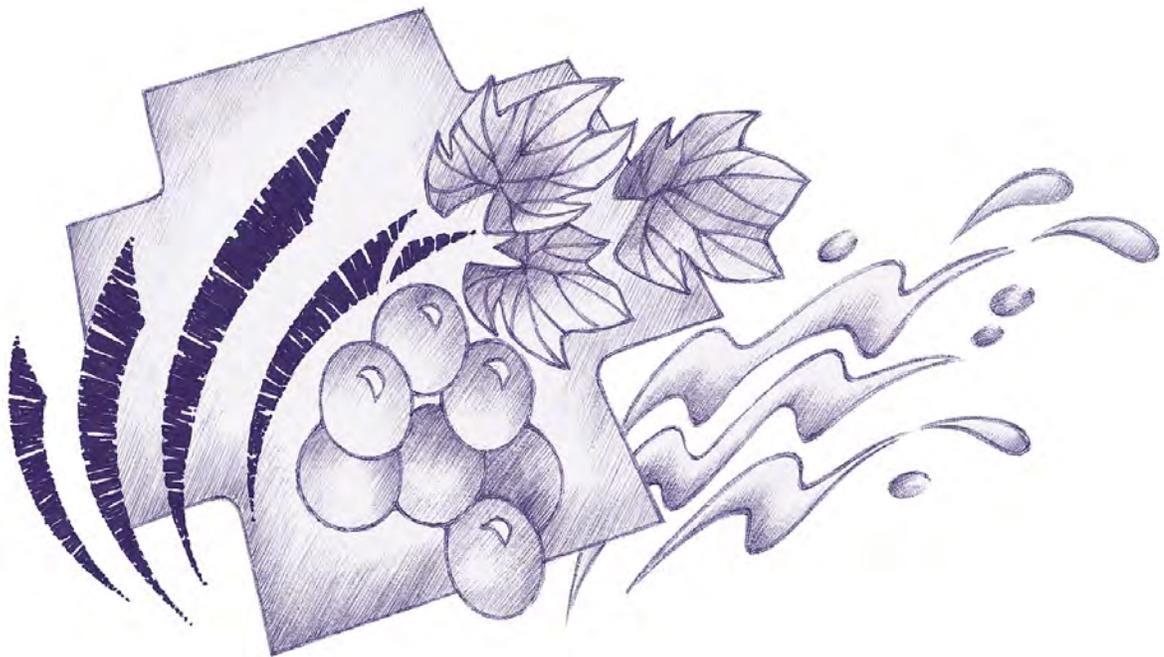
Reflect on some of the ways you have been changed or challenged as a result of this study. Offer petitions of thanksgiving for that growth. Pray for wisdom and strength to begin to make changes in the way ministry happens in your congregation so that it can be even more effective in making disciples. Pray for openness in your congregation to receive these ideas and for conviction to work toward that end.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT SESSION

The end of this study simply represents another beginning: an ongoing commitment to grow in faith and faith practice. Covenant to continue together as a small group OR look for ways to become involved in other small groups or studies in your congregation. Review the resources section of this guide to discover the dozens of possibilities for ongoing study and growth.

The only person who has the right to say that he is the person who has left all to follow Christ; such a person knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace.

(The Cost of Discipleship, p. 55)





faith practices, faith lives

A L U T H E R A N P E R S P E C T I V E O N F A I T H P R A C T I C E S

By Dr. Martha E. Stortz, Professor, Historical Theology and Ethics,
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I N T R O D U C T I O N : A C O N V E R S A T I O N

What does the term “faith practices” mean to you? How would you define faith practices?

“Are you a practicing Christian?” a friend asked in the course of a conversation. “No,” I laughed, “I got it right the first time.” The truth is that I need all the practice I can get. “Getting it right” is exactly the wrong way to think about faith. Faith is more a matter of “being got” than “getting it.” American philosopher of religion H. Richard Niebuhr put it this way: “We sought a good to love and were found by a good that loved us.”¹ The words of the hymn “Amazing Grace” put this truth to music: “I once was lost, but now am found....” Like a flare from a foundering ship, practices position us to be found. *What are the faith practices of practicing Christians? Is there a uniquely Lutheran perspective on them? What are the faith practices that will lead the church into the next millennium?*

F A I T H P R A C T I C E S : W H A T T H E Y A R E A N D D O

Practices are God-shaped and God-shaping activities that add up to a way of life. Faith practices come out of Scripture, but are lived out in the world. For those who want to become a part of the way of life called “Christian,” faith practices describe the kind of attitudes and actions that make up that life.

F a i t h p r a c t i c e s c o n f e r i d e n t i t y

Though practices seem to tell us what to do, in reality they tell us who to be. They confer identity. Approached by a group of young people who wanted to know what it meant to be a Catholic, Archbishop Rembert Weakland replied: “Go to mass every Sunday, and work in a soup kitchen every week for six months. Then you’ll know what it means to be a Catholic.” He did not recommend reading Thomas Aquinas or the latest papal encyclicals; he did not assign the *Baltimore Catechism*. He told these young people to commit themselves to a regular discipline, sticking to it whether they felt like it or not. He invited them to immerse themselves in those God-shaped and God-shaping activities that were central to the faith. This is how they would know what it meant to be a Catholic.

Someone asks, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” How would you respond?

As God-shaped and God-shaping activities, faith practices both *bring us into a tradition* and *serve as the face of that tradition in the world*. Because they bring us into a tradition, practices help us know who we are: we know ourselves as the people who do these kinds of things. For example, a friend is a writer, and he is a writer because he does the things that writers do. He became a writer by living the discipline of daily writing, whether he felt particularly inspired on a given day or not. Stretches of not being able to be at his writing desk leave him frustrated and wondering who he is.

What does it mean to you to become “mature” in the faith? How does that maturing happen?

I am a Christian. Part of the reason I know I am a Christian is because I do the things Christians do: show up in church, study Scripture, pray for my neighbors. These practices are not usually mountain-top experiences — in fact, they rarely are. The everydayness of my faith practices is hard news for some. It certainly was for the young man who abandoned the church of his childhood because it was not “doing anything for me anymore.” Had he given his childhood faith a chance to mature? Fitting mature life-experience into the faith of a child can be a lot like fitting a grownup’s foot into a baby shoe. Could this have been what Paul referred to in his letter to the Corinthians? “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways” (1 Cor. 13:11). Is the question — “What will this do *for* me?” — even the right question? More than doing something *for* us, living a set of faith practices over time and in a committed and disciplined way does something *to* us. Most important, our faith practices bring us into the way of life called “Christian.” As we move more deeply into them, the Spirit uses these faith practices to mature our faith. Through practices, a tradition enters the heart, mind, soul and spirit. Practices provide the soil for our ongoing and lifelong religious experience.

Faith practices also serve as the public face of a tradition in the world. They not only identify us to ourselves; they also identify us to others. Campaigning for the civil rights of African-Americans in the 1950s, Martin Luther King, Jr., did not try to speak a religious language that would mask his unique upbringing. No one would have remembered words like “I have an idea that I would like to share with you....” King’s vision was more than an “idea,” it was a “dream.” Behind that dream were words from the prophet Joel, for those who had ears to hear:

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28-29)



How is the “language of your faith” evident in your life? In the life of your congregation? How do children learn that language?

Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke in the very particular images and metaphors of his tradition. He spoke in his mother tongue, and he had a religiously tutored first language to use. The language of faith expressed his deepest convictions and gave him concrete images that spoke across traditions. King did not talk about oppression in general or hope in the abstract. Rather, through particular biblical images, he talked concretely about what bound him as a black man and what he hoped for his children in the middle of the twentieth-century United States of America. Drawing on biblical images and metaphors, King evoked in his hearers their own concrete examples of oppression and hope.

We need to give our own children no less. They do not need the freedom to choose their own religious faith practices; they need a first language of faith. If they do not have a language for religious experience, they will have trouble identifying it. After all, how could a child of the desert begin to describe snow? Why would she need to?

In addition to bringing us into a tradition and serving as the public face of that tradition in the world, faith practices do several other things.



What does it mean to you to say that you have not found God, but have been found by God?

Faith practices reflect and define relationships
Christianity is not primarily about accepting certain doctrines or living up to certain obligations — though those are a part of one’s faith life. Christianity is primarily about being in a relationship. All the rest follows.

For all his great wisdom about relationships, Augustine, the ultimate seeker, wondered how he could possibly have missed this. In his autobiography, he assesses the twists and turns of a rich life. And he discovered that at the very moments when he had been trying to attach himself to Great Ideas — Truth, Beauty, and the Good — he had already been found. He sought a “what” and was found by “Someone.”

This relationship to “Someone” is not a private hotline to the sacred. It shapes all other relationships. The Great Commandment says: “You shall love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:38-39). The command depicts a threefold relationship made up of love that embraces God, self, and community. When one leg of the triangle is shaky, the whole pyramid collapses.

The triad — God, self, and community — defines our religious practices. If the relationship to *God* is left out, practices become mere group activities. These actions that leave God out lose their purpose and simply work to create the sacred in human form. If the loving relationship to *self* is erased, practices become exercises in false humility and homemade martyrdom. Self-sacrifice, a key virtue in many religious traditions, works only when there is a valued and valuable “self” to freely offer. If the *community* evaporates, practices become experiments in private spiritual wandering. The presence of a community is absolutely essential to discern the spirits, to test the practices, and to expand our spiritual vision, lest that vision become shortsighted or cloudy.

What evidence of the threefold relationship do you see in your own faith actions? In the actions of your congregation?

Faith practices teach and train the emotions

Take a time-honored cultural practice of watching television and look at its impact on the emotions. Tune in during Saturday morning, kiddie-time TV, and think about the feelings evoked. A fourth-grade class in Portland, Oregon, took notes: whether kick-boxing or punching, shooting or slashing, there was a violent act every 60 seconds. What emotions are evoked? The answers are chilling: fear, aggression, desensitization to violence and desire for more. Practices have the potential to transform or deform the emotions. Just as sinews connect bone to bone, emotions connect people one to another. They are the connective tissue of human society. Depending on how they are trained, they can build up or tear down.

Faith practices train the emotions in ways that are God-shaped and God-shaping. For this reason, sixth century abbot Benedict of Nursia recommended the daily practice of common, spoken prayer. During a week of prayer, the monks would move through the entire book of Psalms. Imagine the impact this practice had on the emotions, and think of the emotions evoked. The psalmists paint with a rich emotional palette that carries all colors of the rainbow. There is room in a relationship with God for everything: rejoicing and despair, consolation and abandonment, judgment and mercy. Reading the Psalms lets the word color us, bringing out the many hues in our experience with God and our neighbor. We find ourselves with an emotional range we could not ourselves choose or expand.

How have you seen emotions trained by experience? How have you seen emotions trained by prayer?

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In your understanding, how is the “practice” of worship shaped by Scripture and the teachings of the church?

Faith practices are deeply traditioned

Faith practices are done together and over time; they presume community and history. As Christians, we do not need to walk into Holy Week or Advent wondering: “What shall we do this year?” The services follow a flexible pattern which believers have observed for centuries. Following in their footsteps, we join them across time and space.

In the background of faith practices is Scripture; in their foreground is the church’s teachings or doctrines. Each is critical in terms of informing and directing practices. Scripture informs faith practices. Christians trace the practice of baptism back to the command of Jesus; Scripture informs that practice. But if Scripture informs practices, teachings direct them. The church’s doctrines furnish a certain framework for faith; faith practices show us how to walk in that framework. Practices allow us to live out a faith in word and deed. There is a two-way relationship between doctrines and practices. Without the church’s teachings, practices are empty and aimless. We might do them by rote or routine, but we have a hard time figuring out what they are about. Without practices, however, doctrines are merely “head trips.” We might give them lip service, but they have not entered the body of either the believer or the community.

The interaction between teaching and Scripture may suggest some change of practices. Many Protestant churches found the customary practice of ordaining only men to be in opposition to their doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Viewed in light of Paul’s clear statement in Galatians that in Christ “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female....” (3:23), that teaching forced a re-examination of the customary practice of ordaining men.

Faith practices train us in the way we see our world. Faith practices become “eye exercises” by which the Spirit corrects our vision, aligning our eyes in communion with God. This “new sight” is finally not an end in itself, but a gift. One can read the works of Aristotle without realizing that there were poor people in the city of Athens. They were simply invisible to him. But had Aristotle’s vision been corrected by the lens of Scripture, he would not have missed seeing “the widow, the orphan, the stranger in your land.”

What does it mean to you to have the “eyes of faith?” What do those eyes help us to see?

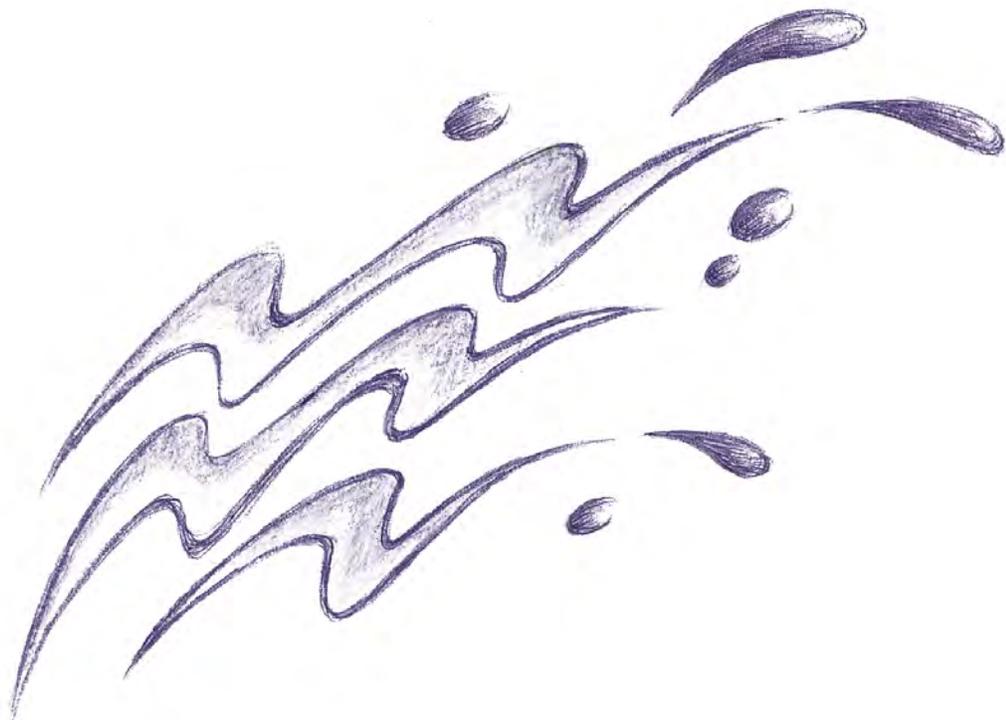
In summary, faith practices are God-shaped and God-shaping activities that compose a way of life. They identify us to ourselves and to others. They reflect and sustain relationships to God, self and community. They teach the emotions. They are deeply rooted in tradition. They give the gift of new sight, changing the way we see ourselves and everything around us. And when faith practices are practiced faithfully, they balance individual and community. Faith practices are not activities that we choose to do, but, rather, activities which, if we do them in a disciplined and regular way, over time choose us. Faith practices set us deeply within a tradition — a concrete expression of faith.



In what way have you been shaped by the practices of your faith? How have you identified and been identified by those practices?

All faith practices reflect and sustain a connection with a God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. All share in the goal of communion with God, and each brings its own gracious gift. In response to a course requiring that students commit themselves to a daily faith practice, a student chose prayer; in particular, prayer for her enemies. She readily confessed to using this prayer as a means to an end. She had ulterior motives and expected external goods: insights, eased relationships, some measure of compassion.

Over time, however, the practice itself drew her in. Most unsettling was the way in which she began to see herself as an enemy of God, in her easy ability to generate ill-will toward God's creatures. As she was drawn into this practice of praying for the enemy, she found other practices made a new and different sense; the utter graciousness of forgiveness in the public order of confession and absolution, the generosity of the Lord's Supper. Scholars speak of the unity of the virtues. There is also a unity of faith practices. They come together, because they all lead us into the Spirit's gift of communion with God.



FAITH PRACTICES AS 'MARKS OF THE CHURCH'

The Specter of Works-Righteousness

Lutherans have tended to shy away from teachings about spiritual practice or discipline. Anything done in a disciplined or regular manner smacks of works-righteousness! Yet again and again, Martin Luther exhorted his parishioners to practice the faith. What he identified as the “marks of the church” were nothing less than God-shaped and God-shaping activities given to Christians for their lives in the world. For Luther, these practices revolved around the preaching and hearing of the Word like planets whirling around the sun: baptizing and making new Christians; sharing the Lord’s Supper; forgiving and asking for forgiveness; ordaining and commissioning leaders; praying, praising, teaching people the faith; discipling or following in the way of the Cross.² These “marks of the church” signaled where the church could be found in the world; they told “what, who, and where” the church is.

Think of the Taizé’ chant: *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.* “Where there is love, there is God.” Think of altering that slightly, and what Luther intends becomes clear. Where there are people baptizing, there is the church. Where there are people teaching, there is the church. Where there are people listening for the Word of God, there is the church. These core faith practices locate the body of Christ in the world. They are not the only places where Christ is present, but by engaging in them, we learn to recognize Christ when he is present. We learn to discern Christ’s body in the world.

Moving out from these basic faith practices, we find secondary practices orbiting the same core: marrying and burying, confirming, blessing a meal, remembering the dead, singing heartily and well.³ Somewhere in the outer orbits of this universe of faith practices we might locate the time-honored traditions of coffee hours after worship or potluck suppers in the church basement. As long as these practices organize themselves around the Word of God, they fit in this universe of Christian practices. Faith practices open the way into the heart, which is the place in which the Spirit creates religious experience. Luther was adamant that these gifts were given to Christians and remained in their possession. They did not belong to priests, popes or princes; they belonged to the people who received them.

What Luther condemned as works-righteousness were “self-chosen” works, not these God-chosen gifts. He pointed here to a distinction between practices and techniques. Practices are good in themselves, while techniques aim at some external goal as means to an end. The woman mentioned initially elected to pray for her enemies as a technique to achieve social harmony, not as a practice. Gradually, however, the regular prayer drew her in and became for her a good in itself.

“Self-chosen works” were techniques aimed at pleasing or placating an angry God; practices were gifts of God given to the people of God. Imagine an uncle who wanted to teach his young nephew how to play chess. The boy was uninterested, so the uncle struck a bargain. For every game the boy won, his uncle would give him a piece of candy. Initially, the nephew learned to play chess as a technique aimed at acquiring candy; chess was a means to an end. Over time, however, the game itself drew the young man in. Chess became an end in itself; it was a practice. As he began to play



How do you find God in your world? For you, where is the “body of Christ?”

How have the practices of your faith been a gift to you?



What is your understanding of the difference between a faith practice and a technique? Why is that difference important for you?

for the sheer joy of playing, his fascination with the game overtook his interest in acquiring candy.⁴

Luther feared that Christians would use spiritual disciplines as means to an end: techniques aimed at earning their salvation. Focused on a goal which they could never achieve, they would overburden themselves and miss the gracious gift of God in Christ. This had been his own experience in the monastery; despair drove him to faith. Practices as “marks of the church” differ from spiritual techniques in that they are God-chosen gifts, given to God’s people for life in the world.

“Holy Things” for “Holy People”

Luther characterized the popular piety of his time as a spirituality of “holy people” and “holy things”: saints and relics. Prayer books offered prayers to any number of exceptional and extraordinary people. Courts and wealthy noblemen collected relics of the saints and martyrs, believing that contact with them brought some “holiness” to the owner. Every medieval altar contained the relic of a saint or martyr. “Holy things” and “holy people” dominated the religious landscape.

Luther was both a creature of this world and creator of a new one. He preserved the saints, but pointed out that they were also sinners. He refused to define the church as a place or an office, restricting it to cathedrals, offices and popes. Rather, the church was “the Christian holy people” and “the congregation of the faithful.” These people were not exceptional, extraordinary or dead; they were the fathers and mothers and children, the bakers and brewers and barbers who populated the pews. Sainthood and sinfulness — these were the Christian holy people, and this was the church.

These ordinary saints also had their “relics” or “holy things.” They were the “marks of the church,” gifts God has given to identify the church in the world. Finally, it was Christ’s body, not that of St. Anne or St. James, which sanctified the believer. Luther urged Christians to seek contact with Christ’s body through its marks in the world — the faith practices given by God.

Think for a moment about the body of Christ as a human body; think of the marks that were on it at the time of his death. There were marks in his hands and feet where the nails were pounded. There was the mark in his side where a spear was jabbed. The apostle Thomas would not believe that he was in the presence of Christ until he could see these marks and place his hands in them.

Luther did not expect any of us to do better than Thomas did. We are, after all, neither exceptional nor extraordinary; we are saints and sinners. We, too, need to put our hands into the marks of the body of Christ to know that we are in the presence of the Son of the living God. Graciously that reassurance is given. The marks of the body of Christ in the world are faith practices. They are given to us so that we will recognize the body of Christ in the world.

Where is the church for you? How do you identify it?

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The Word “Preached, Believed, Professed and Lived” On different occasions, Luther listed the “marks of the church” differently. His flexibility allowed for changing situations and contexts, but central to each list was the Word “preached, believed, professed and lived.” Indeed, Luther regarded this as the primary mark of the church: “...even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there....”⁵ The other marks of the church revolved around the Word like planets around the sun.

Luther did not restrict the operation of the Word to sermon, to Scripture or to sacraments, but he expected believers to encounter the Word there. Familiarity with the Word, as it was preached and shared in church, helped the believer identify it elsewhere, because the Word was everywhere present: the Word preached in private prayer (and Luther cautioned his barber to listen for it);⁶ the Word preached in the works of a Christian’s calling and in the very tools of his trade, as he boldly emphasized in his writings on the Sermon on the Mount:

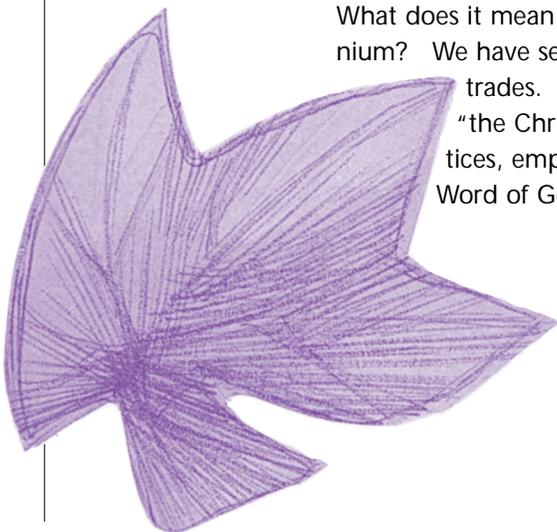
“If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools — at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure — and you will read this statement inscribed on them. Everywhere you look, it stares at you. Nothing that you handle every day is so tiny that it does not continually tell you this, if you will only listen. Indeed there is no shortage of preaching. You have as many preachers as you have transactions, goods, tools, and other equipment in your house and home. All this is continually crying out to you: ‘Friend, use me in your relations with your neighbor just as you would want your neighbor to use his property in his relations with you.’”⁷

In his counsel, Luther reflected occupations from the daily lives of both women and men; everything from thimbles and needles to scales and measures. We could add to his illustrations with the tools of our own trade: computer screens and chalkboards, mops and scrub-brushes, rulers and compasses, coloring books and tricycles. Whatever the tools, the point remains the same. We find the Word surrounding us if we would but stop to listen. The presence of the Word “preached, believed, professed and lived” signals the presence of the church in the world.

Seven Faith Practices for the Next Millennium

What does it mean to “preach, believe, profess, and live” the Word in this new millennium? We have sermon, Scripture and sacraments; we have the tools of our various trades. In addition, there are seven basic faith practices that mark the life of “the Christian holy people” in the new millennium. These seven faith practices, emphasized in the ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship, revolve around the Word of God like planets around the sun.

In what way are you “preaching” in your life? What message are you giving?





What part does prayer play in your Christian life? What might it mean for you? What can it mean for your congregation?

P R A Y

The regular discipline of personal and corporate prayer marks the lives of Christians. Prayer places us in the presence of God; prayer allows us to intercede for the needs of the neighbor. Luther himself daily prayed the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. He found that the busier he was, the more time he needed in prayer, and he acknowledged days on which he was so busy, he could not get by without spending three hours in prayer! It took that long for the day's anxieties to drain away so that he could be in the presence of God.

In his daily practice of prayer, Luther stood in a long tradition of prayer that had communion with God as its goal. But Luther altered and refocused the practice toward service in the world. While much mystical prayer led to contemplation and sought ascent to God, Luther directed prayer to being sent into the world. Not contemplation, but temptation and suffering were the final issue of prayer: in the world "by his assaults [the devil] will teach you to seek and to love God's word."⁸ Engagement with the Word sustains Christians in the world; engagement with the world drives Christians back to the Word. The daily discipline of prayer nurtures Christian disciples for service in the world.



What part does study play in your Christian life? What might it mean for you? What can it mean for your congregation?

S T U D Y

In the ancient church, most new Christians were adult converts to Christianity. They went through a process of initiation into the faith which involved study of Scripture, instruction in various forms of prayer, and explanation of the symbols and actions of the liturgy. The process culminated in the Easter Vigil, where the new Christians were baptized, anointed with holy oil, and given their first communion.⁹

As the practice of baptizing infants became more and more prevalent in the fifth and sixth centuries, this process of initiation disintegrated. Baptized at birth, medieval Christians were taught visually; statues, paintings, altar pieces, and the various symbols in the church taught them the language of faith and the stories of Scripture. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the invention of the printing press and the growing number of people who could read provided access to the printed word as a tool in religious education.

Disheartened by the state of parish education in a visit to all the churches in Saxony in 1527, Luther prepared the Small and Large Catechisms for instruction in home, school and congregation. Christians were to be lifelong learners. Study informed discipleship. Luther envisioned his *Small Catechism* as the foundation of learning for life. It told Christians what they were to do (the Ten Commandments), what God had done for them (the Creed), and finally, what and how to pray (The Lord's Prayer).¹⁰ The *Small Catechism* could be easily memorized and inscribed on the heart.

Then and now, biblical preaching familiarizes audiences with the stories of Scripture. But, unlike Luther's parishioners, we own Bibles and can read them on our own. In addition to its place in private prayer, Scripture offers us stories of the ordinary saints Luther so loved to describe in his biblical commentaries: Joseph, Mary the Mother of God, the prophet Isaiah, and others. Entering the world of Scripture initiates us into a story-shaped world and offers us a way to understand our own. Study of the Catechism and Scripture mark the life of Christian discipleship.

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W O R S H I P

Corporate worship offers a unique way to come into the presence of God and to praise the God who called all of creation into being. Luther regarded prayer, public praise and thanksgiving to God as one of the “marks of the church.” The hymns he wrote for worship often reflected Christmas and Easter joy. Worship made of the congregation a *Mundhaus*; literally, a “mouth-house,” as people raised their voices in song, petition and praise.

Through the ancient prayers and songs of Christians across the centuries and around the world, we enter into a community that goes beyond the barriers of time and space. As we join that throng, we are shaped by the liturgy. Prayers follow a pattern of praise and petition; we acknowledge who God is and what God has done; we plead for God’s continuing action in the world. Look at the Collect for Easter Day in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*:

O God, you gave your only Son to suffer death on the cross for our redemption, and by his glorious resurrection you delivered us from the power of death. Make us die every day to sin, so that we may live with him forever in the joy of the resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Praise precedes petition. We give thanks for who God is; then we ask for God’s continuing blessing. Intercessory prayer offers to God the needs of the neighbor and the concerns of the world. We ask for the neighbors’ prayers for us, even as we assure them of our petitions for them.

Corporate worship features the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. Read, preached, sung and recited, the Word of God vibrates around us, tuning our souls. In the Lord’s Supper, we receive Christ himself, in, with and under the elements of bread and wine. By sharing in that sacrament, we receive again the food that sustains us for service. As we daily return to baptism we are made new. Participation in the sacraments helps us discern the presence of the sacred in our daily lives; through the experience of God’s presence in public worship we can trace the extraordinary presence of God in our ordinary lives. We know both where to look and what to look for. Worship sets us on the path of the cross-shaped life of discipleship; we acknowledge God’s participation in our lives, and we offer ourselves in service to the neighbor.

I N V I T E

In private and in public worship, the Spirit calls us through the Word to “preach” our faith as we serve our neighbor. But where are our pulpits? Words from the Gospel of Matthew still challenge each one of us today: “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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19)

The Great Commission impels us to the practice of invitation or evangelization. It names baptism, it names us and it becomes the lens through which we are invited to view and approach others. Baptism makes explicit who we are and whose we are: we are God’s. Baptism moves us beyond our families of origin to sense our identity as members of the whole family of God. Faith-inspired compassion for our “sisters” and “brothers” moves us to share our faith and love with conviction.

What part does worship (public and private) play in your Christian life? What might it mean for you? What can it mean for your congregation?





What part does invitation and evangelization play in your Christian life? What might it mean for you? What can it mean for your congregation?



What part does encouragement play in your Christian life? What might it mean for you? What can it mean for your congregation?

The mission we have been given is at the very heart of our life of faith. We have not been called into God’s family to simply enjoy being called a child of God or to gather with others who have been baptized to celebrate what we have received. We have been sent. We are to “tell what God has done for us” in a way that invites those who are not yet baptized to know the God who loves them and has redeemed them in Jesus Christ. More than just a practice, the gift of invitation is the very way we live in relationship with others who have yet to hear and believe.

E N C O U R A G E

Early Christians were like any other family — mealtimes were often the occasion for division and disagreement! Writing to Christians at Rome, the apostle Paul chided those who were quick to judge the table manners of their fellow Christians. The meat-eaters disparaged the vegetarians; the non-drinkers put down the drinkers.

To this community of disgruntled diners Paul directed sage advice: “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you....” (Romans 15:7) His injunction carries the weight of “Befriend one another....” In the etiquette of the Ancient Near East, the people with whom a man dined were his friends, and his friends were the people with whom he dined. Paul’s counsel reminded the Christians at Rome of the fellowship they shared in Christ, who had made them not servants, but friends (John 15:15). He appealed to the office of friendship, which was characterized by benevolence; literally, wishing the other well. “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor” (Romans 15:1-2).

Luther captured the importance of this practice of encouragement in his explanation of the Eighth Commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Characteristically, he turned a negative “thou shalt not” commandment into a positive “thou shalt” commandment. Not only should we refrain from betraying, slandering or defaming the neighbor, but we should “apologize for him, speak well of him, and interpret charitably all that he does.” Luther knew the corrosive effects of negative thinking and gossip on the fabric of community. He also knew that we can often inspire people to act better than they might otherwise act. He regarded the practice of encouragement as one way in which the Gospel itself offered counsel. Citing Matthew 18:20, “...where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,” Luther commended the practice of “mutual conversation and consolation of brethren.”¹¹ He envisioned a community of friends, called together to listen to the Good News and challenged to be a mouthpiece of that Good News to one another in speech, comfort, and friendship.

Luther’s community of friends would also encourage each other in the lifelong task of Christian education. Christian education or catechesis (from the Greek *katechein*, “sounding back”) is teaching what God “wishes us to do or not do” (Decalogue), a “setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God” (the Creed), and a demonstration of “how we are to pray” (the Lord’s Prayer). Luther insisted that every baptized Christian must have a minimal theological understanding of what God has done, is doing, and is yet to do. The practice of encouragement involves striving together for some understanding of life with God. We teach the faith as a gift offered through Christ crucified that cannot be achieved on our own.

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What part does service play in your Christian life?
What might it mean for you?
What can it mean for your congregation?

SERVE

A congregation in the Pacific Northwest has a brief, but powerful, mission statement: “Gathered to worship; scattered to serve.” The Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies” the Christian holy people, but then sends them into the world in love and service to the neighbor. The Christian life is not one of maintenance, but one of mission, and that mission is in and to the world.

The Book of Acts provides the template for service in the world. The first “act” of the apostles is to be reoriented. As the book opens, they gaze up into heaven at the coattails of their ascending Lord, only to be chided by a couple of angels: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” (Acts 1:11) The work of discipleship lies elsewhere, on earth in love and service to the neighbor.

Where we look determines what we see. If we look around us instead of only up, we will see the faces of our neighbors. To a Lutheran, all the world is a neighbor, and that insight suggests an interdependence among all of creation. The neighbor figures powerfully into Luther’s theology, both as the one whom we serve and the one who serves us and upon whose kindness we depend.

For Luther, the actions that would best serve the neighbor and most conform to the cross-shaped pattern of discipleship reside in works of our calling. Whether teachers or bus drivers, janitors or lawyers, we would find out how to be a neighbor to those around us by doing the best job possible. In contrast to contemporary spiritualities that seek God in individual feelings and religious sentiment, Luther asserted strongly that God also meets the Christian in social roles and relationships with others. These constitute “masks of God” in the world, in which and through which God continues the work of creation. We serve quite literally as God’s hands in that ongoing work of creation.



GIVE

“The gifts of God for the people of God,” the pastor announces, inviting parishioners to the Lord’s Supper. The gift of the body and blood Christ keeps on giving; we give because of what we have been given. Instructing the Corinthians how they are to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the apostle Paul prefaced his remarks with this same paradigm for giving. “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you....” (1 Corinthians 11:26) The implication should have been clear to them: “Give what you have so abundantly received.” The Words of Institution followed immediately upon this preface.

Luther made a similar connection. He faced his own dilemma of giving. In the medieval world, priests, nuns, and religious orders played a key role in relief of the poor. Priests dispensed alms to the poor; tables outside the cathedrals collected food and other goods for them; masses brought in money for them. Taking apart this elaborate welfare system raised the urgent question of relief of the poor. Luther brought 1 Corinthians 11 to his defense. He commended to his own congregations the ancient practice of gathering food and material goods in the church and distributing them among the poor. Then, he noted, the sacrament was “properly used” and people “understood this fellowship...well.”¹²

Luther took an additional step in his own version of welfare reform and created a new priesthood which would now be responsible for relief to the poor: “the priesthood

What part does giving play in your Christian life? What might it mean for you? What can it mean for your congregation?

of all believers." Convinced that there ought to be no beggars in Christendom, he counseled every village to become acquainted with the poor in its midst. After all, this is what the priest would have done.

If we would include ourselves in the "priesthood of all believers," we must accept the duties and responsibilities of that calling. Empowered by the Body of Christ in the Lord's Supper, we move into the world in witness and service, giving what has first been given us. Think of the Offertory Prayer: "We offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us — our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love." The prayer contains both the form of our giving (giving money, volunteering our time, sharing our talents) and the attitude which accompanies it (joy and thanksgiving). The faith practice of giving marks the Christian life of discipleship for Christians who are also priests.

' F O L L O W M E ' A N D ' B E N O T A F R A I D '

Linked to the "marks of the church," these faith practices help us to know and follow the path of discipleship. Luther described this as the "way of the Cross." It is a rough journey, one we would not have chosen and one we could not have envisioned. But, then, disciples do not choose their masters; they do not choose their journeys. They are chosen, and they follow. We hear this in words Jesus speaks again and again in the Gospels: "Follow me." The only words Jesus says more frequently are the words: "Be not afraid." This is not a coincidence.

Discipleship is dangerous. Jesus reminds the impetuous Peter of its perils: "...when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go" (John 20:18). This description of mature discipleship should terrify the person who is simply looking for a religion that will do something for him or her. The seeker feels entitled to having desires satisfied and needs met. The disciple knows that desires become transformed through practices that do something for us by first doing something to us.

The image Jesus uses echoes Luther's own image of the beggar's hand that reaches out for the grace of God and the kindness of the neighbor. A hand accustomed to grasping requires an extraordinary amount of physical therapy to unclutch and open. Faith practices initiate that therapy. If we can make of them a habit, rather than something we do when we feel like it or when we have time, we will find over time that the Spirit has made our hands flexible and our hearts open.

If the Word is to be "preached, believed, professed, and lived," we will need all the practice we can get. These faith practices demand disciplined and regular attention from the people of God. The visibility of the church depends on it. The church will have a public face in this new millennium because Christian people commit themselves to these daily faith practices and live in them to the glory of God and the service of the neighbor.

Review the seven faith practices. Think through how they have been a part of your life and the life of your congregation. How can you commit yourself to living these practices more fully? How will the promises and the gifts of God in Christ help you in that intention? How can these practices become more fully a part of the life of your congregation? What might it mean to both members and those not yet members if these were a visible feature of your life together?

E N D N O T E S

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1941), 138.

² Cf. Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," in Martin Luther's *Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 539-575.

³ These and other faith practices are discussed lucidly in *Practicing our Faith*, ed. Dorothy Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187.

⁵ Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," 547.

⁶ Luther's barber, Peter Beskendorf, asked his client how to pray, and Luther responded with a letter outlining the way he himself prayed. He counseled Peter to listen for the preaching of the Word: "The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers." Luther, "A Simple Way to Pray," *Luther's Works: Vol. 43*, ed. Gustav K. Wiencke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 198.

⁷ Luther, "Sermon on the Mount, (Sermons)," in *Luther's Works: Vol. 21*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 237.

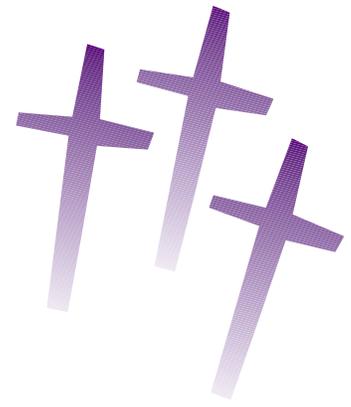
⁸ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings, 1539," in Lull, *Basic Writings*, 67.

⁹ For more on the ancient catechumenate, see William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995). Or see the "Welcome to Christ" resources available from Augsburg Fortress.

¹⁰ Luther explained his rationale for this structure in the Large Catechism. Following his explanation of the Ten Commandments, he observes: "In it we have seen all that God wishes us to do or not to do. The Creed properly follows, setting forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in brief, it teaches us to know him perfectly....Now follows the third part, how we are to pray." Luther, "Large Catechism," *The Book of Concord*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 411, 420.

¹¹ Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles 3.4," in *The Book of Concord*, 310.

¹² Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body and Blood of Christ, and the Brotherhoods," in *Basic Writings*, 262.



faith practices

a s s e s s i n g t h e i r p l a c e i n y o u r l i f e

This assessment tool offers a quick description of the seven faith practices highlighted through the Call to Discipleship. Use this resource for personal or small group reflection as a way to consider their value and significance in your own life or the ministry of your congregation.

Read the descriptions of each faith practice and consider the questions that follow with an awareness that there are no right answers or expected levels of accomplishment. The invitation to discipleship is a call to journey deeper with Christ. No person or ministry is every fully what we hope or God intends us to be. Avoid the “guilt trap” that sometimes comes from feeling we don’t measure up. Instead, view this as an opportunity for helpful personal or group reflection and an invitation to embrace new growth and commitment.

P R A Y



Prayer is the way a disciple enjoys an intimate relationship with God. Prayer can be private or public, ritualized or conversational, silent or out loud, spoken or sung, words or action, simple or profound. Through prayer God’s will is discerned and greater clarity is gained for our journey. Prayer is powerful. Indeed, God’s creative, redeeming and healing power is often directed through prayer.

Jesus modeled the power and importance of prayer and provides our inspiration to embrace a prayerful stance toward all moments of life. One of the key ways Jesus showed his love for his Father was by regularly engaging in prayer. Throughout the Gospels we read how Jesus “went up to a mountain to pray” or “knelt down and prayed” or “continued all night in prayer.” As Jesus prayed, he gained a clearer sense of who he was (his identity) and what he was to do (his mission). Before he taught or healed, before choosing the Twelve or submitting his will to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed. Whatever the opportunity or challenge, Jesus turned to his Father first and sought the guidance of God.

Prayer is Adoration (praise, honoring God), Confession (saying “I’m sorry,” acknowledging sin, that “I can’t do it on my own”), Thanksgiving (saying thanks, counting blessings, allowing God’s perspective to shape life) and Supplication (asking for, praying for others, petitionary in character) — ACTS. The Lord’s Prayer and Luther’s interpretation in the Small Catechism provide ample instruction for the content and elements of prayer and a prayerful life.

Part of a disciple’s job description is to pray frequently.

to next page

S T U D Y



The regular study of the Bible and books that help to enliven its message (e.g. Luther's Catechism, commentaries and other study resources) is a key way the disciple practices loving and knowing God. Study happens privately through personal Bible study and a regular devotional time. Study also happens publicly as families and friends learn together, in small groups, and through larger gatherings of formal study and worship. The maturing disciple attends to "study" in both private and communal contexts.

Through reading, meditating and the study of Scripture, the lively word of God becomes active in the lives of believers. For thousands of years, the words of Jesus, the teachings of the prophets and apostles, and the stories of God's people have revealed God's heart and hope for the world and each one of us. The Holy Spirit inspires us through Scripture to see ourselves as we are and as God would have us become. Through the Bible we come to understand how God works in the world, for the world and through people like us.

Part of a disciple's job description is to study Scripture diligently.

W O R S H I P



Worship is the practice of "stepping away" from the pattern and press of daily life to intentionally love God. In doing so, the disciple gains a deeper understanding and experience of the majesty, mercy and mystery of God. In worship we praise God for being God, for being our God!

The disciple can "step away" from the routine of the moment to honor God in numerous ways: through participation in the public event of a worship service; through the creative act of art, drama, dance, craft, music and song; through listening to a sermon or receiving the sacrament; through an encounter of God in the beauty of creation, and more. While "worship" is more than what we often mean by the word "worship," the maturing disciple acknowledges that the act of corporate worship within the context of a celebrating congregation is key and necessary to a disciple's walk and life of devotion.

Part of a disciple's job description is to worship God regularly.

I N V I T E



The experience of God's loving touch in one's life is a gift the maturing disciple feels compelled to share with others. One way our faith becomes active is when we put into words what God has done for us. Words of witness and acts of genuine hospitality directed toward our friends, relatives and neighbors create the opportunity through which the Holy Spirit brings others into a relationship with Christ and his church.

The biblical model for evangelism is relational: friends bring friends to Jesus. "Come and see" are the operative words and find frequent expression in the Gospels, the story of the early church, and in the tradition of the church over the centuries. The disciple plants seeds and invites; the Holy Spirit works the miracle of faith and conversion.

Part of a disciple's job description is to invite others often.

E N C O U R A G E



Disciples are not born mature; in reality, many disciples never grow beyond the infancy stage of their relationship with Christ. Inherent to the journey of discipleship is the ongoing call to mature in faith.

Growth in faith happens as we are mentored and as we mentor and encourage others. Christian education is the more formal way children of God are disciplined in their faith. Mentoring relationships are a less “institutional” way the building of faith happens as more mature disciples become “stewards of the mysteries of faith” with seekers. Encouragement happens between more seasoned disciples and those growing, between friends at similar points in their journey encouraging each other to growth, between key teachers such as pastors and congregational leaders and students of the faith. In this process of exchange it is not only the learner who grows, but the one who mentors and teaches. The maturing disciple knows she is never finished; that the path of maturity continues to the day we exchange this life for the next. A biblical model for this process can be Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8).

Part of the disciples’ job description is to pass on the faith.

S E R V E



When the prophet Micah told his people how to practice faith, he told them to do justice and to love mercy (Micah 6:8); When Jesus was asked about ultimate matters, part of his response was “to love your neighbor as yourself.” Practicing justice and doing acts of mercy and service put flesh on God’s love. Caring for others in Jesus’ name in active, tangible ways 1) incarnates Christ’s presence and heart to others; 2) helps those we serve in places where they truly hurt and have need, and, 3) is a witness to those who are watching from the sidelines about the integrity and heart of Jesus’ followers.

Jesus didn’t only address the spiritual needs of the people he met. His was a high-touch, hands-on ministry that addressed human needs for health, wholeness and inclusion. The maturing disciple seeks to serve as Jesus served.

Part of the disciples’ job description is to serve for the sake of others.

G I V E



The maturing disciple knows that everything belongs to God; we are merely caretakers and managers. In response to God’s touch in our lives, we offer ourselves joyfully to others: our time, our talent and our financial treasures. God has blessed us abundantly, providing us “with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day” (Luther’s Small Catechism). In and through our baptism we receive and discover our spiritual gifts. The growing disciple finds ways to unpack and use those gifts for the sake of Jesus, the church and the world.

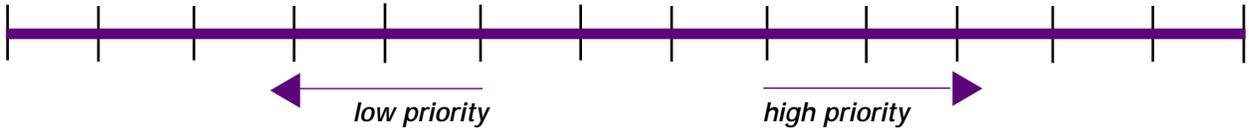
Knowing God has entrusted us with abilities and goods we ask, “How can we use these resources to love God?” Thus we do not waste time striving to be rich in things, but to be rich in love. The maturing disciple is also maturing in financial stewardship, understands the biblical concept of the tithe and is growing in sacrificial and joyful giving toward and beyond a ten percent response in all areas of life.

Part of the disciples job description is to give freely.

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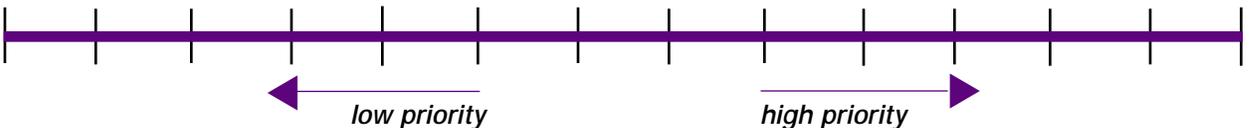
faith practices their place in your life

Consider the seven faith practices in your own life. Place letters designated for each practice (P for Prayer, W for Worship, etc.) at points on the scale which you feel best reflect the expression of that practice in your life. Take a few moments to consider the meaning of your selections. If you are completing this exercise as part of a group, find a partner and discuss your thoughts.



What new commitments might you consider as part of your own call to discipleship? List these and share them with a friend.

Complete this same exercise from the perspective of your congregation's ministry. Place letters designated for each practice (P for Prayer, W for Worship, etc.) which best reflect your sense of how significant each practice is within the life of your congregation. Complete the following two questions and share your answers with members of the group as a way to both celebrate your present ministry and consider areas where there might be room for growth and encouragement.



List some of the ways your congregation takes seriously each of the faith practices.

Where might there be room for improvement or growth?

Some of the language in this assessment tool is adapted from *Doing Faith: Basic Practices for Growing Christians*, Copyright © 1999, Augsburg Fortress. For further study, order this resource by calling: 800/328-4648; code: 15-7860, ISBN 0-0866-3873-7

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Writer: David Poling-Goldenne



Bulletin Inserts

all in the family

Strengthening the Church-Home Connection

From worship to the arena of daily

The Call to Discipleship is an invitation to walk with Christ twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Creating memorable contexts for uplifting the Call to Discipleship will inspire a lasting impression of the actual commitments made. Corporate worship is a key place to equip and energize children, youth and adults for faithful living. As you do your overall planning, you may want to consider integrating each faith practice as a theme for a worship service. On the following pages, you will find resources for inviting the congregation to formally respond to the Call and engage more fully in each practice. There is a reproducible two-page resource for each practice that includes:

- A rite of commitment – a responsive litany of prayers that identifies the practice as fundamental to the Call as it invites participants to make a personal commitment to nurture this practice in daily life.
- Suggestions for home-based faith conversation and activities to help families of all ages, stages, and configurations nurture each practice.
- A sampling of resources to lend support to those you may wish to promote or display from your own church library.

Ready to copy and distribute

You will maximize the impact of this tool if you utilize and distribute them during worship services. You might also consider using them for Sunday school openings, retreats, small group meetings, direct mailings, etc. The camera-ready copy for each resource folds to a 11 x 4.25 inch format. It is designed to be a bulletin insert, with the logo for Call to Discipleship standing out above the top of the bulletin.

As you make your overall plans for your Call for Discipleship, you will want to decide when it will be most appropriate to use these resources. They may be used over a period of seven weeks, once a month or within any time frame you choose.

to next page

Within the context of worship

Consider the theme and flow of the service in which you are choosing to uplift a particular faith practice. Position the rite of commitment to follow a moment of inspiration about the Call and the practice you are highlighting. Consider the following possibilities:

- As a conclusion to the service of the Word, following the sermon and prior to the hymn of the day.
- Just prior to the offertory prayer. When used here, one of the offertory prayers follows the litany.
- As part of an expanded dismissal rite. The blessing by the pastor and the dismissal by the assisting minister together with the people's response would follow the litany.

Note: These litanies have not been prepared as a substitute for the prayers of the people. The scope of these litanies does not allow for the range of concerns which these prayers need to address.

Making the connection to baptism

You may want to set the stage for each rite of commitment with a reference to Baptism as the most fundamental Call to Discipleship. You may even want to incorporate a candle lighting ritual (using small battery-operated or wax candles for each participant to hold.) to heighten the affect. The following litany may be used to preface each rite.

Note the optional suggestions to accommodate it's placement in the worship service.

L I T A N Y

P As Lutherans, we consider Baptism our initial call to discipleship. Through the waters of baptism, we are pardoned from sin and marked with the cross of Christ to grow in Christian faith and community. The lighted candle celebrates our call to let our lights so shine before others that they may see our good works and glorify our father in heaven. As baptized children of God and disciples of the living Christ, let us proclaim, "May our lights so shine!"

Response options:

C May our lights so shine!

or

P ... let us stand in community and profess our faith in the words of the Apostles' (or Nicene) creed.

C I believe....

or

P ... let us sing, "Shine, Jesus Shine." (WOV 651. Other intergenerational or age appropriate songs of commitment like "This Little Light of Mine" could be used instead.)





faith practices:

PRAY

- Make bedtime a time of personal attention and rich conversation. Read, sing and reflect on the joys and frustrations of the day and pray in a conversational way. Encourage all to let go of their worries and believe that God will hold them.
- Offer “instant prayers” or brief, spontaneous prayers as you and your family encounter joys and challenges through out the day— “Lord, help Marya with her test today. Amen” or “Thanks for the sunset!”
- Use Luther’s *Small Catechism* as a guide for prayer. Review the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer to gain a greater understanding of how Jesus taught us to pray.
- Let the sight of a police car, fire truck or ambulance prompt you to say quick prayers for the people involved.
- Enrich your leave-taking or times to say goodbye with this prayerful exchange

“The Lord be with you. And also with you.”

- Nurture natural ways to pray. God doesn’t need to hear grand and glorious words. God longs to hear our voice anytime, anywhere and for any reason.

RESOURCES

Prayer: Meeting God in Daily Life. Lyn Klug.

Face To Face With God in Your Home: Guiding Children and Youth in Prayer. Carolyn Luetje and Meg Marcrander.

Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/328-4648

Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.



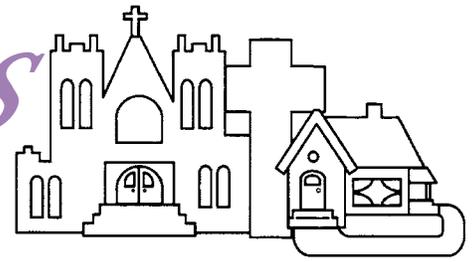
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“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- L** As disciples, we are called to do the things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Prayer nurtures our relationship with Jesus and provides support for daily living. Shall we join the first disciples in their earnest plea, “Lord, Teach us to pray?”
- C** Yes! Lord, teach us to pray.
- L** As we gather together for worship, small group study and fellowship, shall we pray?
- C** Yes! Lord, teach us to pray.
- L** As our hearts overflow with thanksgiving for God’s creation, God’s people and God’s life-giving activity around us, shall we shout praises to our God most high?
- C** (Shout!) Yes! Lord, teach us to pray.
- L** In moments of doubt, sadness, challenge or discouragement shall we whisper with the Psalmist, “I look to the mountains, where will my help come from? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth?”
- C** (Whisper) Yes! Lord, teach us to pray.
- L** When caring for the needs of others, shall we call upon the name of the Lord and ask for mercy?
- C** Yes! Lord, teach us to pray.
- L** Leaders in homes and families, will you join in table and bedtime prayers and other spontaneous songs and words of prayer and praise throughout the day?
- C** Yes! Lord, teach us to pray.
- L** Children, will you open your hearts to walking and talking with Jesus?
- C** Yes! Lord, teach us to pray.
- L** Then, join me in prayer, as we honor our call to discipleship.
- C** Thank you Lord for the privilege of talking with you as we walk through our days. Amen

nurturing lifestyles

that are Christ's style



PRAY

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship as they nurture prayer in their homes.

“Pray without ceasing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

BRINGING IT HOME

Experts say that a person may speak up to 40,000 words a day. Of course, that number will vary depending on your situation.

Name some of the people with whom you have frequent conversations. Think of some of your favorite words and phrases.

Prayer is a special way to share our thoughts with God. Prayers come in all shapes and sizes. They can be formal or spontaneous, original or borrowed. They can be in print or orally passed down from one generation to the next.

PRAYER=TALKING TO GOD

To pray, just start talking. Or, stop talking and acknowledge God's presence in a moment of silence, like David in Psalm 46:10.

“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

Prayer is two-way communication. It involves talking and listening.

Talk about times you have prayed or observed others while they were praying. Name some prayers that are familiar.

When we pray, our words may be similar to those we use in conversations with others. They might include:

- Words that speak our praise for God's presence and activity.
- Words that ask for God's understanding and forgiveness for mistakes we've made.
- Words that describe the people and things for which we are thankful.
- Special requests for things we'd like God to provide — nice weather, healing and good health, a good attitude and motivation for accomplishing things, food and justice for all people.

Look through the following ideas you can use to nurture prayer in your family. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt them to your situation.

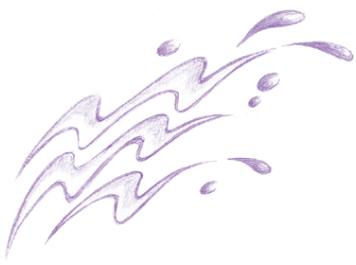
- Pray a prayer of thanks before meals. Whether “one for all or all for one,” memorized or spontaneous, long or short, get the good Lord in on it!
- When praying the table prayer, “Come Lord Jesus be our guest, let this food to us be blest,” place an extra chair around your table to actually symbolize Jesus' presence. Or use, “Blest be God who is our bread, may the world be clothed and fed. Amen.”
- Decide as a family to set aside a minute or two around noon everyday to pray for each other. Whisper quick prayers of thanks or ask for God's presence and support for the others.
- Use “Oh God, thank you. Amen” as a quick table prayer or spontaneous response to special people and things you see in the world.
- Scan your local newspaper for age-appropriate articles that tell of people or situations you can include in your prayers. Consider the lives of the people involved and the feelings they might have and share a prayer for them.

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!

- As you begin your day, preview your day's activities and pray for the teachers, coworkers and friends you will encounter.
- In times of conflict, stop and take a moment to ask God to help you “let go” and make a fresh new start.
- Set up a space in your home for prayer and meditation.
- Consider praying this prayer together:

Dear Jesus, thank you for my (family member) to live with heart to heart; to hug, to smile, to laugh with. We've been together from the start. And for the times when we forget how special we each are, help us to let go and make a fresh new start! Amen.





- Weave your reflection on God's Word with a study of the issues that confront you in your local and global community.
- Have conversations about how current events affect the way you live out your call to discipleship in God's world.
- Give children the opportunity to include Bible stories in their imaginary play. Set up play stations for them to act out specific stories—the Christmas story (Luke 2), Noah's ark (Gen 7-8), Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6), Jesus calm's the storm (Mark 4:37-39), Jesus feeding the 5000 (John 6).
- As you and your older children experience life's "ups and downs," invite them to consider some of the personal conversations David had with God about challenging times in his life. They are recorded in the book of Psalms.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths."
— Proverbs 3 5-6.

R E S O U R C E S

- *The Home Altar*, a children and family devotional magazine by subscription
 - *The Word in Season* or *Christ In Our Home*, adult devotional magazines by subscription.
- They are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers: 800/426-0115, ext. 639
- Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.



study

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faith practices: STUDY

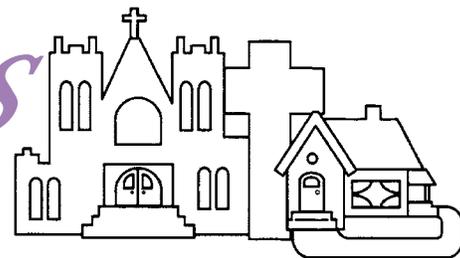
"Be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern the will of God, what is good, perfect and acceptable."

— Romans 12:2b

- L** As disciples, we are called to do the things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Studying God's Word reveals God's presence and activity throughout history and refreshes our lives today. How shall we respond to the privilege to grow in our faith?
- C** Lord, renew our minds that our lights may shine.
- L** Shall we be open to the proclamation of God's Word as inspiration for our faith in daily life?
- C** Yes! Lord, renew our minds that our lights may shine.
- L** Shall we join with others in life-long learning through Bible study and small group support?
- C** Yes! Lord, renew our minds that our lights may shine.
- L** Shall we engage in personal study and meditation upon God's Word through regular devotion and prayer?
- C** Yes! Lord, renew our minds that our lights may shine.
- L** Leaders in homes and families, will you become familiar with Luther's Small Catechism and share age-appropriate Bible stories, psalms and prayers as you nurture faith in your home?
- C** Yes! Lord, renew our mind that our lights may shine.
- L** Children, will you be ready to learn how you can follow Jesus as you read and listen to God's Word?
- C** (Children and Youth) Yes! Lord, renew our minds that our lights may shine.
- L** Join me, in prayer, as we honor our call to discipleship.
- C** Lord, help us to make the study of your Word a priority in our daily lives. Amen

nurturing lifestyles

that are Christ's style



STUDY

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship as they grow in their knowledge and understanding of God as their Creator, Savior and Friend.

"I pray that God may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through God's Spirit as you are being rooted and grounded in love."

— *Ephesians 3:17b-18*

BRINGING IT HOME

When was the last time you needed to refer to something or someone other than yourself to accomplish something?

Identify some of the things you may have used—a map or road sign, a recipe, an advertisement, tv guide, a book or self-help resource, a personal comment, critique or piece of advice.

We take guidance from these "informers" all the time. They help us know who we are and where we are and guide us as we seek to accomplish things in safe and healthy ways.

A commitment to follow Jesus involves the same kind of prompting. We need daily direction and encouragement to "stay on track." If we want to grow in our understanding and devotion to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is vital that we read the Bible and gain ongoing insight and inspiration for daily life.

Identify some ways you can stay "on track" with Jesus.

Look through the following ideas that will help you learn more about how God is active through the word in your life. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt them to your situation.

- Display symbols of faith in your home at a level everyone can see (e.g., pictures of Jesus, crosses, Bible quotes, etc.).
- Purchase Christian CDs, videos and cassettes to provide contemporary interpretations of Bible stories and concepts.



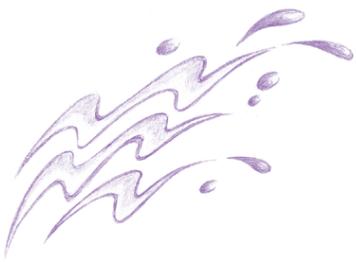
- Share Bible stories that relate to ongoing activities in your life.

Parades	Mark 11:1-11 (Palm Sunday)
Picnics	John 6:1-14 (Feeding the 5000)
Fishing	John 21:1-14 (The miracle of the fish) Jonah 1 (Jonah and the Great Fish)
Gardening	Matthew 4:30-32 (The Mustard Seed) Luke 8:4-8, 11-15 (The Sower)
Camping	Genesis 28:10-22 (Jacob's Ladder)
Travel	Luke 2:41-52 (Jesus in the temple) Luke 2:1-7 (The trip to Bethlehem)
Sightseeing	Genesis 1:1-31 (Creation Story)
Boat rides	Mark 4:35-41 (Jesus Calms a Storm) John 6:16-21 (Jesus Walks on Water)
Zoo	Genesis 6:9-8:22 (Noah's Ark)

The Bible was written by over 40 different authors over 1,600 years and yet it all has the same basic theme and message.

- Choose age-appropriate Bibles and devotion books to ground your family faith discussions in a Bible story or verse.
- Learn Bible verses that promote healthy behavior, such as "May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord," and post them on your refrigerator.
- Attend intergenerational and age-specific classes to grow in knowledge and faith with others.
- Immerse your family in Christian community and experience Bible truths and promises through song, study, creative arts, relaxation and recreation. Consider spending part of your family vacation at a Bible camp.
- Preview movies and TV programming through a faith lens. Question whether they will enrich your hearts or tempt you to stray from God's way?





faith practices: WORSHIP

- Place a candle on your dinner table. Light it as you begin your meals, with the words of John 8:12, "Jesus said 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" Teach the others to respond with an adaptation of Matthew 5:16, "May our lights so shine before others that they may see our good works and give glory to our father in heaven."
- Look over the first three commandments (Exodus 20:1-8). Take a moment to figure out what they mean to you or your family. What does worship have to do with establishing God as more important than anything? How does the first commandment affect the others that follow?
- Remember your baptisms. Place a small bowl of water on the kitchen table. Encourage the ritual of dipping fingers in the bowl to celebrate the cleansing and refreshment of our baptisms as you make the sign of the cross on your forehead.
- Check out your local Christian book stores for a variety of CDs and cassettes to fill your car time with inspiration and praise.

RESOURCES

- *1•2•3 Church*. Gail Ramshaw.
- *Sunday Morning*. Gail Ramshaw.

Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/638-3522.

Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.

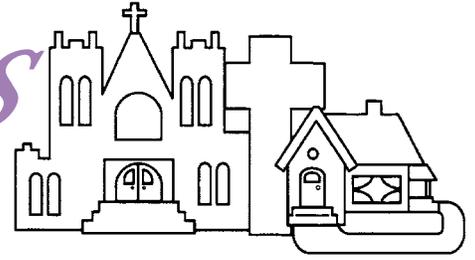


*"Let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe."
— Hebrews 12:28b*

- L** As disciples, we are called to do the things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Worship brings us into God's presence and calls us to prayer and praise. The psalmist David extends this invitation, "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker." Shall we join him?
- C** Yes! Lord, inspire us to come to you in our worship.
- L** Shall we put God first in our hearts and in our lives?
- C** Yes! Lord, inspire us to come to you often in our daily worship.
- L** Shall we gather for regular worship and faith growth in community?
- C** Yes! Lord, inspire us to come to you in our worship.
- L** Shall we participate in the Holy Sacraments and receive God's grace as they bring us the indwelling Spirit of God?
- C** Yes! Lord, inspire us to come to you in humility.
- L** Leaders in homes and families, will you find informal and creative ways to give God praise through art, craft, song or daily prayers?
- C** Yes! Lord, inspire us to come to you in our daily worship.
- L** Children, will you be open to learning special ways you can give God praise?
- C** Yes! Lord, help us to put you first in all we say and do.
- L** Join me, in prayer, as we honor our call to discipleship.
- C** Thank you, Lord, for giving us a voice and a heart to thank and praise you. Amen.

nurturing lifestyles

t h a t a r e C h r i s t ' s s t y l e



W O R S H I P

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship with songs and praise to God.

“Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.”
— *Psalms 150:6*

B R I N G I N G I T H O M E

Have you ever gotten a compliment from someone? It's a good feeling to have someone notice you and the things you do. People compliment others to express admiration and recognize accomplishments. Teachers share stickers and comments. Cheerleaders shout their praise and loyalty to a team. Parents and families have celebrations to mark accomplishments and honor each other.

What are some ways you compliment other people? How do you show your love and admiration to friends and family members?

W O R S H I P I S A W A Y O F G I V I N G G O D A C O M P L I M E N T !

We use songs and prayers to express our love for God and our appreciation for the amazing gifts God gives. And we grow in our amazement as we become familiar with God's saving activities throughout history and listen to God's Word for us today. Worship services refresh us through God's loving embrace in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Through worship we are energized by God's Spirit to live lifestyles that are Christ's style!

Worship is not dependent upon the time, place, the formality of it's content or the tradition of it's music. Worship has to do with an attitude of reverence for God and genuine expressions of love, thanksgiving and devotion. Worship can be public or private, indoors or outdoors, upbeat or reflective.

Look through the following ideas to nurture worship in your family. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt them to fit your situation.

- Make it a priority to worship regularly with others. It will strengthen your faith identity in community.
- Take some time to offer simple explanations of each part of your congregation's worship service over a Sunday brunch — “Confession means to say we're sorry for the mistakes we're made. Absolution means that God loves us and forgives us, etc.”
- Connect prayers and phrases from a congregational worship service with ordinary moments in your daily life.
- Enrich your greetings and leave-taking with this prayerful exchange: “The Lord be with you. And also with you.”
- Pray the offertory prayer (*LBW*, p. 67) as a morning, evening or mealtime prayer. “We offer with joy and thanksgiving”
- Make the “sign of the cross” as a part of your devotional or prayer ritual at home.
- Give your children a blessing as you leave or at bedtime. You might say:

“May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.”

- Find a way to honor Sunday as a special family day — a day set apart to celebrate God's activity and presence in your lives. Schedule a special symbolic meal. Make it a ritual you can repeat often.
- As you admire the wonders of God's creation, make it a point to honor the Creator.
- Give God thanks as you nurture the many talents and abilities God has given you. Consider sharing your gifts of song, dance, drama or instrument with others in your congregation.





faith practices: I N V I T E

- Look over upcoming programs and church activities. Identify occasions that might be natural entry points for unchurched friends who may already have a relationship with you or your children — like day care providers, coaches, teachers and co-workers.
- Invite neighbors and friends to come for an evening where they can experience God's presence in your home as you provide friendship and hospitality.

Consider the call of Jeremiah... "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying... Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you: I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Then I said, 'Ah Lord God! I do not know how to speak for I am only a youth.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say I am only a youth, for you shall go to all to whom I send you and you shall speak whatever I command you.'" —Jeremiah 1:4-7

- Open your heart each day and invite the Spirit to use you as an instrument of God's will and God's activity. Be yourself. Let your language and lifestyle reflect God's love to and for others.

R E S O U R C E S

- *101 Faith Place: Entry points for Nurturing Faith in The Home.*
- *Back and Forth: A Family Resource* by Debbie Trafon O'Neal

Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/328-4648.

Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.



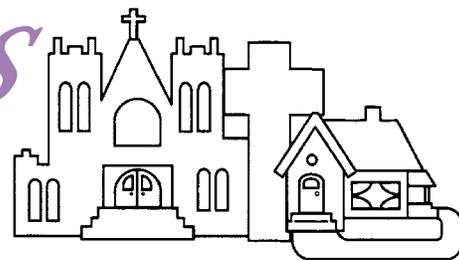
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"Go therefore and make disciples of nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." — Matthew 28:19

- L** As disciples, we are called to do those things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Inviting others to join the journey becomes easier as we experience God's presence and power in our own lives. Shall we join the first disciples in sharing God's Good News through our own life stories?
- C** Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join your journey.
- L** Shall we be open to letting God's love shine through our actions and words so that others may seek Jesus?
- C** Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join your journey.
- L** Leaders in homes and families, will you encourage one another to share stories of God's presence and activity in your daily lives, with friends, neighbors and co-workers?
- C** Yes! Lord, let our lives will be invitations to join your journey.
- L** Will you seek to engage others in conversations that will nurture their faith and increase their desire for growth in community?
- C** Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join your journey.
- L** And will we invite others to join us in our congregational life and worship?
- C** Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join your journey.
- L** Children, will you tell your friends about Jesus and invite them to follow him?
- C** Yes! Lord, let our lives be invitations to join your journey.
- L** Then join me, in prayer, as we honor our call to discipleship.
- C** Thank you Lord for the opportunities you give us to welcome others and to invite them into faith and community. Amen.

nurturing lifestyles

t h a t a r e C h r i s t ' s s t y l e



INVITE

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship as they look for ways to share God's Good News with others.

BRINGING IT HOME

Invitations are fun. An invitation grows out of our relationship with the person who invites us. Invitations often call us to join with others to celebrate life's important events, like weddings and birthdays, and to witness life's transitions, like funerals and retirement parties.

Think of some invitations you have received. Invite your family members to share some, too.

We get hundreds of invitations every day to invest in products and programs. The average child is exposed to 400 ads a day. That adds up to 4,000,000 ads in a lifetime.

Name some ads or commercials. See if you can remember the key phrase or sing the jingles.

Though ads can be memorable, it is more important to remember that a relationship with Jesus has more benefits than a best-selling product. He offers a greater adventure than any party, cruise or safari. Yet we seem to shy away from finding creative ways to get the "good word" out.

But rather than dwelling on the reasons for past failures, let's crash right through our insecurities and think about some ways you might creatively and naturally invite others to follow Jesus.

"The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead and write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates." — Deuteronomy 6:4-9

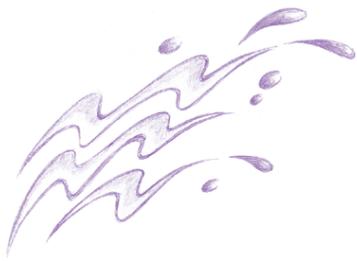
FINDING GOD'S STORY IN YOUR STORY

Learn to make faith connections in the ordinary places and events of daily life. Consider the following places as stage setters for inviting people to share God's Good News.

Gas stations:	Filling a gas tank
Connection:	Who fills your "tank" with all the things you need — like love, joy and good things?
<hr/>	
Grocery store:	Talking about prices
Connection:	Think of some of the things God gives us for free.
<hr/>	
Medical clinics:	The amazing skills of doctors and nurses.
Connection:	God made our bodies to fight disease, but God gifts people with skills that help us keep healthy.
<hr/>	
Natural settings:	Amazing sights and scenery.
Connection:	People make lots of beautiful things, but only God can design cloud formations, a sunset or clear, starry nights.
<hr/>	
Schools:	People who teach us things.
Connection:	God created the knowledge that others share.
<hr/>	
Day care:	Lots of people befriend and care for us.
Connection:	God provides us with people who uphold and support us.

Here are a few more ideas. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt these to fit your situation.

- Take some time around the dinner table to identify some friends or neighbors you might invite to worship with you at your church. Pray for the opportunity to invite and for their openness to come.
- Pray that God will inspire your words and deeds to be reflections of God's presence and activity.



LOVE SHOWS ITSELF IN ACTION!

- Check out Big Brother and Big Sister programs in your community, along with shelters and hotlines for critical care. Consider how you can support these and other programs as a way to encourage others.
- Be available. Just as the little boy offered his fish and loaves to help feed the 5000 (John 6:9), our willingness to let God use what we have is almost more important than what we actually have to give.
- Be a friend to a new family in your church or community. Invite them into your home or meet them at a park or a fast food restaurant.
- Encourage your children to call a friend who has stayed home sick from school or who has missed an athletic game or a Sunday school class.
- Express thanks to those who share their time and talents with you — day care providers, public servants, coaches, dance and music teachers, home nurses. Celebrate the many gifts God has given them.

RESOURCES

- *Soul Gardening: Cultivating the Good Life.* Terry Hershey.
 - *That Reminds Me: Family Story-Starters for passing On the Faith.* Jean Brown Eittrheim.
- Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/380-4648.

Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.



encourage

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faith practices:

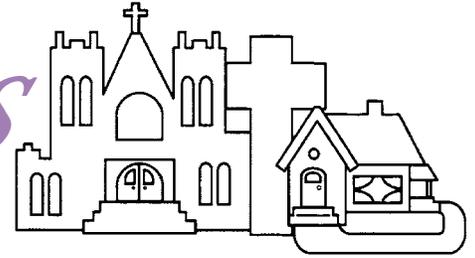
ENCOURAGE

“For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.” — 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

- L** As disciples, we are called to do those things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Encouraging others in faith nurtures the community and shows God’s love in word and deed. Shall we respond to the invitation to encourage one another and build each other up?
- C** Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus’ name.
- L** Shall we look for ways to reach out and support generations beyond our own?
- C** Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus’ name.
- L** Shall we attend to those who face difficult transitions, such as separation and divorce? Shall we seek to sustain those who suffer bereavement; incarceration or physical or mental illness?
- C** Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus’ name.
- L** Shall we speak for those who often cannot be heard, those who are hungry and thirsty or burdened with other issues of injustice around the world?
- C** Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus’ name.
- L** Leaders in homes and families, will you encourage one another in faith, model healthy lifestyles, communicate in love and seek to live at peace with one another?
- L** Children, will you look for ways to show God’s love in your words and actions?
- C** Yes! Lord, help us to share and care in Jesus’ name.
- L** Then, join me, in prayer, as we honor our call to discipleship.
- C** Lord, increase our sensitivity and desire to love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen

nurturing lifestyles

that are Christ's style



ENCOURAGE

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship with a growing sensitivity to those who need to see signs of God's presence and activity in their own lives.

"I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine." — Romans 1:12

BRINGING IT HOME

How many shoes in a shoe store? Hundreds? Thousands? There seems to be something for everyone!

Think of a time you tried on someone else's shoes. How did they fit? Could you wear them for a day?

Imagine what it might be like to have for a parent to switch with a preschooler, or a teen with an older adult, a happily-married homemaker with a single parent working two jobs, an executive with a blue-collar worker, an American with an Ethiopian spouse. When little children shuffle around in adult shoes, we laugh because they look so out of character. And yet, we might tend to feel the same way if we actually walked in someone else's shoes through their average day.

"If then, there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." — Philippians 2:1

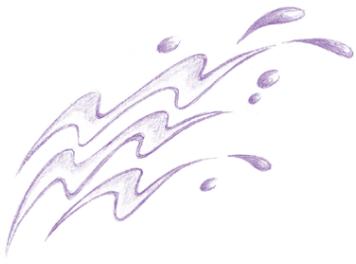
Talk about ways you can be more sensitive to people in need and encourage them in their faith.

Look through the following ideas you can use to help increase your sensitivity to others and your willingness to nurture them in faith. Choose one, two or more.

- Leave a pair of shoes near your door to remind you to be sensitive to people in need.
- Purchase a pair of "heart-shaped" sun glasses from a party supply store. Try them on and think about how the color and shape of lens affects the way you see something. What difference would make if we looked at the following people through God's eyes?
 - Kids on the playground
 - Teammates in athletics
 - Co-workers
 - People who seem to be different from us
 - Clerks, waitresses and service attendants
 - Refugee families throughout the world
- Write words of encouragement and affirmation on self adhesive notes. Stick them on mirrors, doors and other places where others in the family can see them.
- Invite grandparents to send frequent postcards to support the challenges and accomplishments of their grandchildren.
- Be kind to the people you meet. Offer a smile, a greeting or gesture as you pass by. Explain to your children that, "We love, because God first loved us" (1 John 4:7-8).
- Nurture unconditional love. Teach your family members to handle inappropriate behavior with a response, "I might not like what you do, but I'll always love you."
- Find ways to address some of the greater world challenges. Go to the Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs Web page (www.loga.org) to learn ways you can be advocate for change.

"For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, for your welfare and not harm, to give you a future and a hope." — Jeremiah 29:11





faith practices:

S E R V E

- Share your old or extra toys with a local women's shelter.
- Go through your children's clothes with them. Package outfits they've outgrown and deliver them to a local clothing distribution center.
- Contact people in your neighborhood or congregation who are sick or in the midst of challenge. Deliver a meal to them (be sure to call first). Run errands for them or help transport them to doctor appointments.
- Be an advocate for those who are not heard. Communicate your views on specific issues to your local, state and national representatives.
- Bring extra blankets and water bottles to children's athletic events. Offer these to those who need them.
- Be open to sharing your lunch with someone who forgot theirs or can't afford one.

R E S O U R C E S

- *Growing Little Helpers.*
- *Hands-On Service Ideas for Children.*

Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/328-4648.

Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian book stores for other resources.



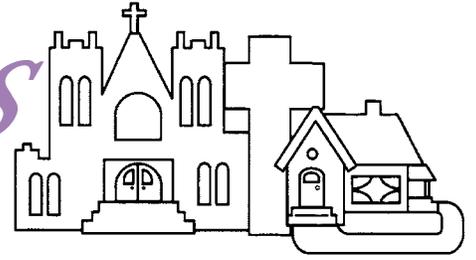
serve

Jesus tied a towel around himself. Then, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet. Then, he said, 'So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.' — John 13:4, 5 & 14.

- L** As disciples, we are called to do the things that enrich our journey with Jesus. Serving the needs of others enriches their lives, gives purpose to our lives and shines as a witness to others. Shall we model Christ's example of servanthood?
- C** Yes! Hand me my towel. I'm at your service, Lord.
- L** When someone is hungry, thirsty or without clothes shall we respond to their need?
- C** Yes! Hand me my towel. I'm at your service, Lord.
- L** When someone is sick or in prison, shall we care for them?
- C** Yes! Hand me my towel. I'm at your service, Lord.
- L** Will we help carry one another's burdens?
- C** Yes! Hand me my towel. I'm at your service, Lord.
- L** Leaders in homes and families, will you foster attitudes and activities that nurture a servant's heart?
- C** Yes! Hand me my towel. I'm at your service, Lord.
- L** Children, will you share kindness, food and clothes with those who are in need?
- C** Yes! Hand me my towel. I'm at your service, Lord.
- L** Then, join me, in nurturing a servant's heart, as we honor our call to discipleship.
- C** Thank you Lord, for giving us eyes to see the need, willing hearts to care and hands that embrace those who wait and wonder. Amen.

nurturing lifestyles

that are Christ's style



SERVE

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship as they reflect the heart of a servant in their homes and communities.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” — Matthew 25: 42-43, 45

BRINGING IT HOME

Of the total 10,080 minutes we live each week, the average Christian spends approximately 60-120 minutes in a church or formal faith community. The rest of the week is spent eating, sleeping, playing, working and all the rest.

Think for a moment about the many activities in which you and your family are involved. Work together to draw a circle on a piece of paper and divide it to reflect the amount of time you spend doing each activity.

What are some of the primary ways you spend your time? How many of them involve serving others?

Look through the following ideas for nurturing service in your family. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt them to fit your situation.

- Create a mission statement for your family. Identify who you as a family would like to be. List some ways you will accomplish the goals and ideals you have chosen. Post your statement on your refrigerator or somewhere where all can see it. Invite all to think about the reasons why God brought your individual family members together.



- Invite children to design coupons on paper or on your computer. Help them decide what the coupons might be good for—free hugs, emptying the dishwasher, taking out the garbage, etc. Encourage them to give the coupons freely.
- Instill a sense of pride in completing household tasks. Make a poster charting jobs that can easily be done. Use stickers, treats and compliments to motivate or reward those who help.
- Model random acts of kindness. When you are in a check-out line, give a place to someone who might be in a hurry or have fewer items. Put a quarter in someone's parking meter.
- Volunteer to help communities following a disaster or get involved in a project to build affordable housing where you live.
- Become involved in “Meals on Wheels” or other food share programs.
- Become involved in opportunities to lead and serve in your congregation. There are dozens of ways to use talents and abilities of children, youth and families. Evaluate your many talents and gifts and let them shape your involvement in service to God and others. Check one the following gifts you might consider offering:
 - computer skills
 - financial management
 - child care
 - writing and editorial skills
 - drama or dance
 - vocal or instrumental music
 - care and compassion
 - prayer
 - hospitality
- Look for opportunities to reach out to your community and to the world. Participate in CROP walks and other pledging activities.





- Use Matthew 6:24-34 for a family devotion. Jesus encourages us to trust God to take care of our needs — just as God cares for the trees, flowers and animals in creation.
- Let your children participate as you do the monthly bills. Older children might organize the checks by number before filing them. Seek to help them nurture a sense of financial responsibility and accountability.

In God we trust.

- When you are involved in outdoor activities, bring along a bag or two to pick up the trash in the area.
- Plant saplings and seedlings in the spring to increase the beauty of the earth and to replenish the soil and the air.
- On a birthday or baptism day, join in prayers thanking God for the gifts that person brings to the family.
- Gift wrap “words” or visual symbols that represent the gifts, talents and abilities that God has given the birthday person. Present this package along with the other gifts you give.

R E S O U R C E S

- *Smart Choices.* Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley.
 - *Six Weeks to a Simpler Lifestyle.* Barbara DeGrote-Sorensen and David Allen Sorensen.
- Both are available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 800/328-4648.
- Your pastor or church leader has access to number of catalogs that provide information on additional resources. You might also browse local Christian bookstores for other resources.



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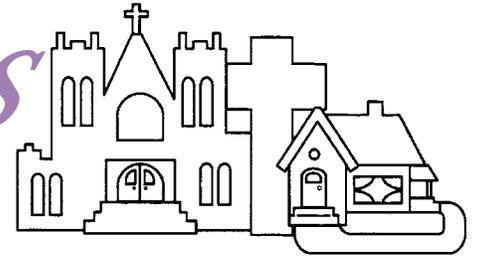
“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

—2 Corinthians 9:7

- L** As disciples, we are called to do those things that enrich our journey with Jesus. A generous heart seeks to serve the needs of God’s people. We have been blessed to be a blessing. How shall we respond?
- C** Lord, teach us to give as you have freely given.
- L** In Corinthians, Paul tells us that God will make us rich enough to be generous at all times so that we can bring many to thank God for the gifts they receive. How shall we respond?
- C** Lord, teach us to give as you have freely given.
- L** When Timothy outlined the disciple’s responsibilities toward others, he instructed that they be carried out without prejudice or special favor. How shall we respond?
- C** Lord, teach us to give as you have freely given.
- L** Jesus advised his disciples to use money wisely by giving to Caesar or the government, what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s. How shall we respond?
- C** Lord, teach us to give as you have freely given.
- L** Jesus called a rich man in search of eternal life to give up his trust in things and place his trust in God. How shall we respond?
- C** Lord, teach us to give as you have freely given.
- L** Leaders of homes and families, will you use your time, talents and resources in ways that honor God and serve others?
- C** Lord, teach us to give as you have freely given.
- L** Children, will you share the many talents and gifts God has given you?
- C** Lord, teach us to give as you have freely given.
- L** Then, join me in asking God to give us generous hearts as we seek to live out our call to discipleship.
- C** Thank you Lord, for so richly blessing us that we may be a blessing to others. Amen.

nurturing lifestyles

that are Christ's style



GIVE

These pages will help people in whatever family relationships they live to honor their call to discipleship as they nurture generous hearts and the healthy stewardship of time, talents and resources.

"God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work."
— 2 Corinthians 9:8.

BRINGING IT HOME

Dollar or cent signs are everywhere. We see them in advertisements, in store windows and outside gas stations. Money is a pretty big deal to us. It is one of many of life's necessities.

Did you know that, aside from the many New Testament references to the Kingdom of God, the Bible spends more time talking about money related issues than any other subject?

Look at a dollar bill and find the phrase "In God We Trust." The words remind us that every time we use money to buy or to invest we affirm our trust in God.

WE ARE BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Share the words to a prayer we often use in worship and discuss its meaning.

Dear Lord, We offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us, our selves, our time and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Look over these ideas for nurturing a generous heart. Choose one, two or more. Feel free to adapt them to fit your situation.

- Identify your gifts. Plan ways to use them to help others. Then help your loved ones do the same.
- Scan your own cupboards for canned and dry goods you can share with a local food pantry.

6% of the world uses over 40% of the world's resources and creates over 70% of it's waste.

- Help children identify clothes they've outgrown and invite them to share them with younger children in need. As a family, deliver your contributions to a local clothes distribution center.
- Add up the wealth you have accumulated. Is it more than enough, just enough, or not enough? Based on your response, decide what you can do to help others in your local and global community who have "not enough."

There is enough in this world for everyone's need, but not for anyone's greed. — Mahatma Gandhi

- Make a contribution to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal or Disaster Relief.
- Model regular giving to your church. Help your children fill their church school offering envelopes when you fill yours. Explain to them why people give.
- Set aside funds for charitable gifts and church offerings off the top of your monthly net income. Giving first inspires a different feeling than waiting to see if there is anything left over.

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
— Luke 12:34

