

A Guide to Session One: Lutherans and Scripture



Set-up: Arrange the seating either around a large table or in a circle so all participants can see each other. Consider setting up a small altar in a central location in the room. Simply drape a cloth on a table. Display an open Bible and a candle. Light the candle when you begin your conversation as a reminder that Christ is the Word Incarnate and that the Holy Spirit is in your midst as you converse. Consider adding a clear bowl filled with water as a reminder of our unity in baptism.

Session objectives:

- To review the Book of Faith four-fold engagement of Scripture using “Some Ways to Read the Bible” by Diane Jacobson
- To review some aspects of the Lutheran theological tradition
- To review the ELCA understanding of the meaning of God's Word

Opening

Scripture reading: Mark 7:24-29 (NRSV)

²⁴From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter."

Prayer: O God, who throughout time has guided and nurtured your children through your Word. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Scriptures which are the story of your never-failing love for us. Open our ears to hear your Word anew as we embark on this study together. Amen.

Welcome participants to this study and briefly explain how it will invite participants into a conversation about how the Bible can be faithfully used in thinking today about issues of justice for women in the church and the world. In this sense, the study is both a Bible study and a chance to give careful attention to *how* passages have been or could be used or interpreted.

Spend a few moments explaining how this study is part of the larger social statement process on women and justice. (See "Leader's Preparation Guide" for more, the section on "About the social statement process within the ELCA." The text there could be printed out as a handout.) Indicate that your group could, though is not required to, summarize their reflections and share them with the ELCA Women and Justice Task Force via email: womenandjustice@elca.org. The decision to do this can be made, or changed, at any point along the way.

Communication guidelines

It is important to take a bit of time to discuss with the group the framework for participation in this study, which includes reading the communications guidelines presented in the "Leader's Preparation Guide." These guidelines should be easily accessible to all. Ask the participants if there are any other guidelines they would like to include. Explain that you will review them at the start of each session.

Four ways to read the Bible

Introduce and share the Book of Faith's "Four Ways to Approach the Bible" bookmark as a summary of the types of questions addressed by each approach to reading the Bible. The bookmark will serve as a reminder as you work through the three study sessions. Pass out copies of "Some Helpful Ways to Read the Bible" by Dr. Diane Jacobson for those who are interested in digging deeper into the Book of Faith approaches to reading the Bible.

If participants are not familiar with the Book of Faith Initiative, you should explain the following background:

The initiative originated as a memorial from the North Carolina Synod to the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to begin a movement to increase biblical engagement and fluency in the ELCA. The Assembly passed the memorial. The five-year initiative ran from 2008-2012 and produced an abundance of Bible studies and other resources based on four ways to study the Bible. The Book of Faith Initiative lives on, and its advancement currently resides with the ELCA program director for faith practices and missional leadership. On a handout you might provide the Web address.

Tell the group they will have the opportunity to practice these methods in this session.

Ask which members of your study group already have experience in utilizing these four ways to approach the Bible. They can be a resource to you and others who may not have the same experience.

Devotional reading

A devotional reading of the Bible asks each of us: What does the Word stir up in you?

Review “Some examples of helpful devotional questions” in the Jacobson document.

Ask participants what thoughts or questions come to mind as they hear about a devotional reading of the Bible. What is new to them? What is familiar?

Historical reading

A historical reading of the Bible asks each of us: What is the ancient historical context and how does it relate to us today?

Review “Some examples of helpful historical questions” in the Jacobson document.

Ask participants what thoughts or questions come to mind as they hear about a historical reading of the Bible.

Literary reading

A literary reading focuses on the story itself and all aspects of it.

Review “Some examples of helpful literary questions” in the Jacobson document.

Ask the participants what thoughts or questions come to mind as they hear about a literary reading of the Bible.

Lutheran theological reading

Share Mark Allen Powell’s “Reading Scripture with Five Lutheran Lenses” downloadable bookmark which is a summary of how Lutherans engage Scripture. (See: URL in the “Supplies needed” section) Additional background and insights are available in “Opening the Book of Faith: Lutheran Insights for the Bible,” pp. 20-45, and in the article “Lutheran Insights that Open the Bible” in the Lutheran Study Bible, pp. 1538-1543.

Review the bookmark with participants.

Use this background if you have time:

How the ELCA views God’s Word:

The ELCA Constitution gives a tri-fold meaning of the Word of God.

1. Jesus Christ is first and foremost the eternal Word Incarnate – the Word made flesh who dwelt among us (John 1:1-5).
2. Preaching is God’s Word spoken among us as law and gospel. The law reveals our sin and need for God’s love. The gospel reveals God’s mercy and love for us beginning with creation and continuing throughout history.
3. The Bible is the written Word inspired by God’s Spirit working through the authors of the various books of the Bible.

Ask the participants what thoughts or questions come to mind as they hear about these five lenses typically and traditionally used by Lutherans as they read the Bible.

Practice using the four-fold approaches to Scripture

Break your group into smaller groups of three or four to practice using the approaches. You can use the opening Bible verse for this session or another where women are central characters such as Mark 5:24-35 (the bleeding woman).

Assign a different Book of Faith approach to each group. Give them 10-15 minutes to use their assigned approach to discuss the text.

When you call them back into the larger group ask:

1. What was that like utilizing the approach you used?
2. What insights into the text did you gain?
3. How did your particular approach give you new insights about the perspective on and the role of women in the Bible?
4. How might your insights affect how we think about what it means to be a human being, that is, a person with gender?

Wrapping up: Next week

Conclude by indicating how the session next week will use this four-fold approach to explore some of the historical issues of problematic biblical interpretation regarding women. The third week will look at areas in which Scripture can inform the study of women and justice. (It could be helpful to provide a list of several passages used in session two so that participants can read them in advance.) Thank the group for their participation and commitment to looking at Scripture together around these issues.

Closing prayer: O God, help us to see your Word as a living word, which can touch our hearts and minds in a variety of ways. Open us to discern your presence among us through your Word so that we might live and be more fully in you. Amen.