

Bible Study Leader's Guide



Leader's Notes

About the theme

The year was 1521. Martin Luther had already been excommunicated by the medieval church and was called to Worms to take back his teachings or be declared an outlaw (meaning anyone could kill him without threat of punishment). Even knowing he was facing a death sentence, Luther refused saying:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason — I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other — my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God. Amen.

The legendary words attributed to Luther come from this moment: "Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God. Amen."

As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation approaches in 2017, The Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod has chosen "Stand" for its triennial theme. The Rev. Dr. Joel Lehenbauer, executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, notes:

While "stand" is not a major theological term in the Bible — at least in terms of quantity and frequency — it is an important one, Paul especially makes good and forceful use of it. Paul teaches that through faith in Christ alone we receive a standing that is grounded in God, not in the world, and that confers fellowship and freedom (Source: A Brief Theological and Biblical Primer on "Stand," point 1.)

This then is where the Bible studies for the 2015-16 LCMS Servant Events are rooted. The devotions and worship material are tied to the Bible studies and also have their roots in "Stand."

Daily Themes

In this series, five sections of Scripture from the Old and New Testaments are used to examine the stand, follow, serve, repeat pattern. While there is a good deal of the Law that is revealed, the leader should remind participants that the Law acts as a mirror to show us our sin, serves as a curb to sinful behavior and guides the Christian life. Particular attention also should be given to pointing out that it is the Law that condemns, but it is the Gospel that transforms.

Day 1: Stand

"Stand and see the salvation of the Lord" – Ex. 14, The Crossing of the Red Sea

Key Scripture: Ex. 14:13-14

Other passages: Ex. 11-12; Ps. 30:3; Ps. 121; Rom. 8:38-39

Day 2: Follow

When God Calls – 1 Sam. 3, Samuel Answers God's Call Key Scripture: 1 Sam. 3:10

Other passages: 1 Sam. 2:27-34; 1 Cor. 7:7

Day 3: Serve

Serve Like Jesus Served – John 12:9-26,

The Plot to Kill Lazarus Key Scripture: John12:26

Other passages: Luke 12:34; John 3:16-17; John 11:38-44; John 12:34; Rom. 6:3, 5; Rom. 8:37-39; Gal. 3:27; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21

Day 4: Repeat

Follow the Pattern – 2 Tim. 1:1-14, Paul's Instructions to a Young Friend

Key Scripture: 2 Tim. 1:13-14

Other passages: Matt.18:15; 1 Cor. 10:31-33, 11:1; Eph.

2:8-10; 2 Tim. 1:1-15

Day 5: Stand

Jesus Stands – Acts 7:54-60, The Stoning of Stephen

Key Scripture: Acts 7:55-56

Other passages: Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 25:21; Luke 22:66-70;

Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9

Some of these stories will be familiar, but others might surprise you. God promises His Word never returns empty (Is. 55:11). While the Word of God is timeless and unchanging, at every age and every stage in our lives, He sends out His Word to accomplish His purposes. His Holy Spirit helps us to gain more insight as we grow in understanding of how God's truth applies to our circumstances.

So what's the goal? The goal is that every day you will come face to face with the grace of God in Christ Jesus, knowing that, come what may, our Redeemer lives! (Job 19:25). He wins in the end, and we do too. In the meantime, Jesus Himself has invited us to follow in His footsteps.

If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him (John 12:26 ESV).

We do so knowing that our service to Jesus changes us and often those we serve. In serving we have the opportunity to love our neighbor (the second greatest commandment). God Himself is working through our service. God is worshiped and glorified through my "offering" of service and those who receive such service might also worship and praise God with thanksgiving in connection to this same offering (Source: Valleskey, *People's Bible Commentary, 2 Corinthians 9:12*).

For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God (2 Cor. 9:12 ESV).

About the Bible Study

Objective

By the power of God's Holy Spirit working through His Word, participants will better understand and appreciate God's love for and service to them in His Son Jesus Christ, empowering them to "Stand" firm in their salvation, "Follow" Him when He graciously calls them to "Serve" and guiding them in the sanctified life as they "Repeat" the pattern of Christian living by revealed by God's strong Word in their lives.

Group Guidelines

These Bible studies have been developed for groups of four-to-six participants. (Consider using the same groups for devotions in order to maximize the time they have to bond and develop trusting and encouraging relationships.)

Group leaders are responsible for guiding the group through reading and discussing the text. They will need to gently keep the group well-paced and focused on the main

points highlighted in the material. While pace is important, intentionally monitoring the participation of each person in the group and ensuring that everyone is being heard and cared for also is key.

Personal preparation on the part of the leader is essential to ensure understanding of the flow of the study and allows for robust and meaningful discussion. It is assumed there will be 45-60 minutes of time for Bible study. In most cases, there will be more than enough material for use within this parameter. However, should discussion go long, the leader will want to make decisions ahead of time about which questions or activities to focus on, cover lightly or omit.

The main goals of these Bible studies and the accompanying devotions are that participants would see and understand more clearly:

- The foundation on which they can stand firm God's love for and service to them as revealed by His Word
- How God's Holy Spirit enables them to follow Him when He graciously calls them to serve and guide them in the sanctified life as they "repeat" the pattern of Christian living revealed by God's strong Word in their lives

Bible study parts

- Talk Among Yourselves (5-8 minutes)
 This section contains a brief story or illustration, which is intended to break the ice and create some initial discussion related to the study. While it is important to include everyone, spend no more than 5-8 minutes on this section.
- Read the Story for Yourselves (15-20 minutes)

 This section is devoted to reading the text, raising questions about the meaning of the passage and focusing primarily on the biblical material. Often, a note about the context of the specific section of Scripture is provided to help participants. Leaders should:
 - Involve participants in reading, answering questions, asking questions of their own and giving insights into the meaning of the text.
 - Keep discussion focused on the clear, simple truths of God's Word and not be distracted by off-topic questions. If asked a difficult question, they should not be afraid to defer an answer to later, reveal that they "don't know" or share that they will need to research that answer.

- Be flexible understanding that more will be revealed in later studies and every single question may not need to be answered now. Emphasize the main points.
- Know that supporting information is offered in bold print in this guide.
- Be clear about Law and Gospel.
- Apply the Bible Story to Yourselves (15-20 minutes) This section encourages application of biblical truth to one's own life, experiences, plans and situations. The leader may once again need to make decisions about where to focus should time become short.
- Closing (5-8 minutes)
 The closing is a brief opportunity to pray for one another regarding what has been learned. Song suggestions are provided from either the *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB), *All God's People Sing* (AGPS) or *Singing Saints* (SS) as these are often readily available to most leaders. However, use leader discretion to decide what works best for you.

Care and Concern for One Another

When someone shares personal information in a group, it is important for him or her to know this information, whether positive or negative, will be held in confidentiality. It will not be shared with others outside the group without permission. Before the Bible study begins, the leader should remind group members of this important safeguard and ascertain their agreement. There is only one exception: If someone shares information that causes the leader to be aware that he or she may be a danger to himself or herself or to someone else, then Christian love should override confidentiality.

Day 1: Stand and See the Salvation of the Lord! — Ex. 14:1-14

Key Scripture —



"And Moses said to the people, 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Ex. 14:13-14 ESV).

Talk Among Yourselves 🦴



Sometimes you can see a disaster coming. Sometimes there's not much you can do to stop it. Such was the case as I drove down a two-lane blacktop road one afternoon in rural Kansas. I knew there were thunderstorms in the area. I had driven through some rain, but I didn't expect to see the funnel cloud dip from the sky and head my way. On either side of the road was a steep drop off. No side roads were visible. I barely had time to think but I know a, "Lord, help me," escaped my lips. I remembered hearing how you were not supposed to stay in a vehicle if a tornado was headed toward you so I stopped the car and turned off the ignition. I was in the process of abandoning the car (which felt safe) and diving into the ditch along the road (which felt horribly exposed) when I saw the funnel switch direction and head across a nearby farm. It picked up a heavy piece of farm equipment (an auger) along the way and disappeared from sight. I remember putting my head against the steering wheel and thanking God for deliverance.

Leader's note: If this is the first time you have gathered as a group, ask everyone to introduce themselves by name, along with one memorable fact about themselves before they answer the first question.

- 1. Talk about a time when have you seen disaster, heartache or a big problem coming your way? How did you handle it?
- 2. If you had to choose quickly between two scary options how would you decide? Why might making a decision based on your feelings be a bad idea?

Read the Story for Yourselves



Leader's note: Law and Gospel. The Law has three functions. It is a mirror to show us our sin, a curb to sinful behavior and a guide to living the Christian life. In the story of Israel's flight from Egypt, God's Law reveals and condemns Pharaoh's sin in his disregard for repeated warnings from God and in his mistreatment of the enslaved people of Israel. Ultimately this results in his destruction. Under the Law, our own rebellious nature also condemns us. But God also is a God of mercy. The Gospel shows us our Savior. Like the people of Israel in the first study, we "stand firm" in the salvation of the Lord, knowing we can do nothing. Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus to fight for us. The victory has been won. We have only to receive it. Guide participants in understanding this.

Read the story of the Israelites preparing to cross the Red Sea in Ex. 14:1-14. (If you have time you can read the whole chapter). You can take turns reading two verses each or guys can read the odd verses and girls can read the even verses. Then spend a few minutes talking about the story using the following questions and observations:

3. As you read the story, what details did you notice? What jumped out at you?

Context note: Ex. 14:1-3. The Israelites are in a "fullout exit" from Egypt! After nine warnings in the form of plagues, it was the final one: the death of the firstborn child in every household that did not have the blood of a lamb on its door post (Ex. 11-12) that causes Pharaoh to release God's people from slavery (12:31). Then God does a weird thing. He has Moses turn the people around so that Pharaoh will think "they are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in" (Ex. 14:3).

4. How does verse four explain what strategy God is using? Why do you think God cares about glory?

Leaders note: The discussion on glory may be pondered briefly now, but it is dealt with more fully in question eight. However, the Lord has announced an unusual plan to Moses and is about to "demonstrate again his Glory to Pharaoh and the Egyptians." Israel too will have cause to fear and respect God as both deliverer and judge (14:30-31). (Source: Wendland, *People's Bible Commentary*, Exodus 14.)

5. What picture of Pharaoh's heart is revealed in 14:5-9?

Leader's note: Pharaoh was not one of the good guys. He had ignored 10 chances to spare himself from God's wrath. He'd treated the Israelites brutally during their captivity. He had hardened his own heart long before God hardened it further. God had actually demonstrated His mercy for the Egyptians in giving them so many chances. For Pharaoh and the Egyptians to know God's glory is to know who He is and to know that He is Lord.

- **6.** When they saw Pharaoh in pursuit, how did the people of Israel react (14:10-12)?
- **7.** During the Revolutionary War, Patrick Henry gave a famous speech:

Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death! (Source: William Wirt, Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry, Webster, Philadelphia, 1816, docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/wirt/menu.html.)

Compare Patrick Henry's response to an enemy attack to that of the Israelites. Why do you think the response of Israel to Pharaoh's pursuit was exactly the opposite from Patrick Henry's?

Leader's note: The cry of the people here shows little trust in the Lord or His appointed leader. We should not be too hard on them though as we might also have such a response in moments of crisis. We see the enemy and the sea but fail to trust in God's promises (Ps. 121; Rom. 8:38-39).

8. Moses has a different response from his people. How does he stay so calm in the face of certain disaster and chaos? How do verses 13-14 answer the question about glory in question four?

Leader's note: God has no need to seek glory for Himself. God alone will ultimately have all glory. But He is carrying out His plan for Israel and Egypt to see. In revealing His glory and power so that Israel's enemies can see it, He is ensuring that they need never fear the Egyptians again. Moses relies on God's direction and points the people back to the one true God who is in the midst of saving them.

Apply the Bible Story to Yourselves 上



9. Reflect on what it means to be caught between two scary options like the author in the introductory story or like the people of Israel in Ex. 14. One option "feels" safer or more attractive but it might be the wrong decision. The other option is more risky, but it is the one that is more informed and guided by God. Some might advise you to "follow your heart" (feelings). Share what it might it look like to "stand firm," to act against what you "feel"? Aren't we supposed to trust our feelings? Has something like this ever happened to you?

Leader's note: How often have we heard the advice given in our culture to "follow your heart"? This is an invitation to idolatry, to setting oneself up as the arbiter of right and wrong based on feelings. But God's Word reminds us that our hearts are corrupted by sin and we do better to stand firm in God's Word and in His salvation.

Everything God has guided the Israelites to do has been directed by Him through His prophet, Moses. Heb. 1:1-2 says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

God speaks and Guides His people through His Word. *Jesus is as John says*, "And the Word became flesh."

10. Read the key Scripture one more time together. Share one meaningful insight you gained from today's study. Tell how it connects to your participation in this servant event.

Closing	Ċ
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As a closing prayer, reflect on these words: "The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Ex. 14:14 ESV).

11.	Share some place in your life where you need the Lord
	to fight for you. After everyone who wants to share has
	shared, take a moment to compose your thoughts into
	a single sentence prayer for the person on your right,
	asking God to fight for him or her and to help him or
	her stand firm based on what he or she shared.

Beginning with the person to the right of the facilitator in
your group, take turns praying for one another. When the
prayer gets back to the facilitator and he or she has said a
prayer, close by saying, "In Jesus name, Amen."

Leader's note for closing: It is noteworthy that even as Israelites moved forward into the waters of the Red Sea, they did not know what God would do. They did not know what would happen once they got to the other side. God worked out His plan for their salvation. He "fought for them" even though they did not understand what He was doing.

Optional Closing Song:

Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me (AGPS 171, LSB 722) Christ Be My Leader (AGPS 81, LSB 861) On Eagles' Wings (LSB 727) Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus (LSB 660)

Day 2: When God Calls – 1 Sam. 3

Key Scripture



"And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant hears" (1 Sam. 3:10 ESV).

Talk Among Yourselves 😓



Many teachers experience the annual dilemma of a new class full of eager young faces all of who assume you'll know their names but you don't. The obvious solution is to create prominent name tags for each desk or each student. It helps the teacher learn names but it also helps students learn one another's names too. Names are important. If someone takes the time to learn to know your name, to know who you are, it is a sign that you matter. It feels good. It's also embarrassing when you should know a name and don't. It's day two. Have you learned everyone's names yet? Let's just check that out.

Koosh ball game, juggling ball game: Everyone gets in a circle after names have been given. The leader starts: "I'm Andrea and I'm throwing the ball to Sally." Sally then throws it to someone else, mentioning them by name, and so on until everyone has had the ball. If the ball drops, start over. Play a couple of rounds (people must throw to different partners each time) until everyone is well and tired. Then, for the last round, begin and then once it's going, introduce three more balls into the mix. The game starts moving very quickly; chaos and hilarity ensue. (Source: faculty.virginia.edu/schoolhouse/WP/icebreakers.html.)

Have you taken the time to learn the names of the people you are serving?

Read the Story for Yourselves



Read the story of Samuel's call in 1 Sam. 3. You can take turns reading two verses each or guys can read the odds and girls can read the even verses. Then spend a few minutes talking about the story using the following questions and observations.

Leader's notes:

Context: Samuel's mother prayed for him to be born while being barren for many years. She promised the Lord if He gave her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord. After Samuel was born, he went to live with the high priest, Eli, in the temple. Eli was an old man at this time and his own grown sons (in the priestly line themselves) were wicked and had brought corruption to the priesthood. In this story, Samuel is called by God and given his first revelation from God in a message for Eli that simply confirmed what God had already told Eli himself.

Law: If participants are not familiar with this story, they may not know that the message Samuel must bring to Eli is one of God's judgment. As high priest, Eli failed to teach God's Word to his family and his people, and he had failed to heed God's previous warning.

The Gospel thread: Yet we see a bright spot. Eli sees God's hand upon Samuel. It is Samuel who God will use to select David as king (1 Sam. 16), and it is through David's line that Jesus will one day be born.

1. What do the words of 3:1 ("And the word of the LORD" was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.") tell you about what was going on in the nation of Israel at this time? Who was at fault?

Leader's note: No one is innocent. As high priest, Eli did not hold the Word up to his family or to the people. The other priests seem to have followed his pattern and the people themselves seem to have forgotten Moses' words to them from the Lord in Deut. 6:4-9 to pass on God's Word in their own homes.

2. We read in 3:7 that "Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The Word of the Lord had not been revealed to him." Samuel was serving in the temple, but he had not yet had a personal revelation from God's Word. He was living with the high priest of Israel. Why do you think he doesn't yet know God's Word? How does this relate to 3:1?

Leader's note: Samuel's mother had taken him to live with Eli when he was quite young (1 Sam. 1:22). Eli must not have taught God's Word to Samuel just as he had not taught his own sons.

3. Why did Samuel not recognize God's voice? Discuss why it took Eli three times to figure out it was God even though he was the high priest.

Leader's note: See leader's notes above for question three. Eli himself no longer remembered God's Word.

- **4.** Read verse 10. God is making Himself and His message very obvious here. Discuss how we hear God's Word today. Where or when have you seen that?
- **5.** God outlines for Samuel why He is angry at Eli and what is going to happen (3:11-14). This would not be news to Eli. God had already told him what would happen (1 Sam. 2:27-34).

Why do you think God still comes to Samuel directly to give him the same prophecy with instructions to pass it on to Eli?

Leader's note: Eli's sons (like Pharaoh) had lived a life of "heart-hardened" unrepentant sinful behavior leading ultimately to their condemnation. This was not God's first warning to Eli. Eli had neglected God's Word, indulged his sons and even failed to make sure the people of Israel knew the Word.

The Lord's first assignment to Samuel, young as he was, was not an easy one but neither would be the tasks in the years ahead. Not only Eli's sons but also the nation of Israel was failing to heed God's Word. Samuel would need to be above reproach and willing to "listen when God speaks." God speaks through His Word.

6. Verse 19 gives us more information about how Samuel matured after that night when he answered God's call. He followed God's Word. It says, "And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." The Lord was with him, and what Samuel said happened. His prophecies came true.

What do you think Scripture is pointing out here about how Samuel handled God's Word? How is that different from the culture he lived in (3:1) and even from his mentor Eli? See note above.

Apply the Bible Story to Yourselves

7. Once Eli realized it was God calling Samuel (verses 8-9), he gave him some great advice to follow: "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." So Samuel went and lay down in his place."

If Eli knew about how God's Word works and should be used, why didn't he follow it in his life? Why didn't he teach his own children or Samuel to follow God's Word?

Leader's note: The five books of Moses were kept in the tabernacle. It is clear here even the high priest of Israel was neglecting to read or teach God's Word (3:1). Samuel had been under His charge but "did not yet know the Lord" (3:7). It took the high priest several times to even recognize that God was speaking. Eli disregarded God's Word. The "why" always goes back to one's own sinful nature. Here again we are reminded that our greatest need is for a savior, Jesus, but "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel ..." (Explanation to the Third Article).

8. Based on the previous question, how can you use God's Word to discern His will?

Leader's note: There is a common pitfall here. God's ultimate will for our lives is accomplished through the work of His Son and is stated in Luther's Explanation to the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed "that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity."

To be steeped in God's Word, to hunger for it, love it, learn it, rely on it and live it as we journey toward heaven will be a great source of comfort, direction, guidance and strength.

9. Read the key Scripture one more time together. Share one meaningful insight you gained from today's study. Tell how it connects to your participation in this servant event.

Closing 🖍

As a closing prayer, reflect on these words: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Ask the person on your right what they think God might be saying to him or her through His Word today. Offer a prayer for him or her asking the Holy Spirit to open his/her heart toward God and His will for his or her life.

Leader's note: Consider giving participants time to think through what they will say or even time to write down their prayers. It is certainly fine if they read their prayers aloud. Encourage them to use their partner's name as they pray.

Or, end with the Lord's Prayer noting especially the third petition of Jesus' words as He taught us to pray, "Thy will be done."

Optional Closing Songs

Hark, The Voice of Jesus Calling (LSB 827) Here I Am Lord (Singing Saints 13) Take My Life, O Lord Renew (AGPS 223) Take My Life and Let It Be (LSB 783) "Come, Follow Me," the Savior Spake (LSB 688) Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus (LSB 685)

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Day 3: Serve like Jesus served — John 12:9-28 The Plot to Kill Lazarus and Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem

Key Scripture ———



"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him" (John12:26 ESV).

Talk Among Yourselves



Have you heard the term "guilty by association?" It means that while you may not personally have done something wrong, you are judged because of the people around you. Its twin is, "Birds of a feather flock together." But it is dangerous logic and may unfairly label someone. Interestingly, today's Bible story begins with an episode that shows you can hang out with the best of people and still have problems with "guilt by association."

- **1.** Share a time when you think you were labeled or judged "guilty by association" in a negative way because of how you were dressed, who you were friends with or an activity in which you were involved.
- 2. How do you think you may have been guilty of labeling others for the same reasons? Have you even struggled with this on this servant event? How do you fight that in yourself when you see it?

Read the Story for Yourselves



Read about the plot to kill Lazarus and Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem in John 12:9-28. Take turns reading two or three verses each.

Leader's note:

Context: This little-noticed event in Scripture begins just before Jesus' triumphal entry in to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Jesus had already raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44). A plot had been discussed by the Pharisees to kill Jesus. Mary and Martha had prepared a meal for Him (at which Lazarus was present) and Mary had, according to Judas, wasted some very costly oil by putting it on His feet, but Jesus defends her.

Law and Gospel: Jesus journeys to the cross to pay for our sin, bearing the brunt of the Law. But the story does not end at the cross. He rises. His sacrifice and His victory over sin, death and the devil are the essence of the Gospel. Others also will pay a price to bring the message of the Gospel to the world. The cost of discipleship is small compared with the gifts of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation.

3. If things suddenly turned hostile toward Christians in the United States, would they be able to convict you as guilty by association? Would they have evidence?

Leader's note: Do not spend too much time here though participants may have seen clear examples of growing hostility in our culture to Christian beliefs. This is more of a self-examination question.

4. Jesus rides into Jerusalem with a crowd. From where do all the people come (verses 17-19)?

Leader's note: The text says that the crowd included those who had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11) and others who had heard that he had done so as well as citizens of Jerusalem. Jews from all over the world were arriving for the Passover.

5. What does verse 16 reveal about what people understood at the time? How does hindsight help them understand things differently much later?

Leader's note: "Unbelievers like to talk about plots and schemes. They suggest that Jesus and His disciples choreographed each step to make Jesus appear to be the Christ. But the passage here makes it clear they did not understand the full significance of what was happening at the time. God's plan for salvation was nevertheless being carried out." (Source: Baumler, People's Bible Commentary, John 12.) This is similar to what the Israelites learned as they crossed the Red Sea (see day one Bible study).

6. The Pharisees exclaim "the whole world has gone after him" (verse 19). To them this probably means other Jews, but the text does note that Greeks also came to speak with Jesus. Their request, "We want to see Jesus." He is fulfilling the prophecy of Is. 60:3 ("Nations shall come to your light"). How do Christians today get to "see Jesus?"

Leader's note: The Means of Grace, Word and Sacrament, reveal the person and work of Christ to us.

Apply the Bible Story to Yourselves 上



7. Jesus predicts His death here. Noting that unless He dies (like the kernel of wheat, verses 24-25), He could not bear the fruit of His mission. He had to die for there to be a spiritual harvest (us). Next, Jesus says:

> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him (John 12:25-26 ESV).

Discuss what it means to "hate your life" in this world? What if you like your life?

Leader's note: Enjoying your life (and the blessings of joy, kindness, relationships, even material things, etc.) is not a bad thing. The issue here is not a joy issue but a First Commandment one. What is most important? In a pinch, what would you choose? Where is your treasure (Luke 12:34)? On our own we choose idolatry of self. But God who has chosen us to belong to Him and who works faith in us through Word and Sacrament also causes the faith of the Christian to bear fruit in love for others. The source of that love is God. It would be better to lose this earthly life than to lose Jesus.

8. "You shall have no other gods." It has been said that if we could only keep the first commandment we would have no problem with the others. But people and things in this world become more important to us than our relationship with Jesus. We see just how challenging it might be to love Him more than life in this world. We are going to blow it, yet there is good news! Consider what comfort these verses might give:

a. John 3:16-17

d. 1 Peter 3:21

b. Rom. 6:3,5

e. Titus 3:5

c. Gal. 3:27

f. Rom. 8:37-39

Leader's note: These verses point us to Jesus. In Him alone we are saved. This is grace. Chosen by God, baptized, adopted as His, we rest secure in His mercy knowing the Father went to extraordinary lengths to set us free from sin. Christians can take great comfort in the strength of God's hold upon us. Indeed, nothing can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:39 ESV).

Closing **C**



9. Share with your group something you learned or where you found joy in serving others today?

Close by joining hands and praying in a circle. Allow each person to offer a prayer related to what he or she learned about servanthood in today's study.

Optional Closing Songs:

My Faith Looks Trustingly (AGPS 175) *My Faith Looks Up to Thee* (LSB 702) Make Me a Servant (AGPS 174)

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Day 4: Follow the Pattern – 2 Tim. 1:1-15

Key Scripture ———



"Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:13-14 ESV).

Talk Among Yourselves 🤛



When I was a little girl, on a fall crisp day, my dad would start a fire in the field across the road from our house to burn wood and brush. One of my brothers had the job of "fanning the flame" as part of the process. Using a piece of cardboard, he would make air flow toward the fire to help make the flames more intense. Soon the fire would be roaring. I didn't know the purpose of the fire but I did know that later in the day I was going to get to roast hotdogs and marshmallows!

1. Share a good memory of being with others around a fire.

Read the Story for Yourselves



Leader's note:

Context: Timothy is a young pastor who Paul regards like a son. Paul is nearing the end of his life. It is likely he will be executed by the Romans. He writes with a heart full of love as a father would write to a son with the last words of advice he will be able to give him on this side of heaven.

Law and Gospel: Here, Paul reminds Timothy what he should do (Law) but also what has been given and entrusted to him (the Gospel) and where he can stand firm.

Read 2 Tim. 1:1-15 together in any way you choose.

2. Who has "fanned into flame" the gift of God within you much like Lois and Eunice fanned it in Timothy (verse 6)? In whose life might you "fan the flame"? Does age matter? Can a younger person "fan the flame" of someone who is older?

Leader's note: God through Paul had entrusted Timothy with the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:13). In verse six, we are reminded that the godly example of faithful parents and grandparents (but also godly friends, godly teachers, godly neighbors, etc.) can be used by God to bring eternal blessings to others. The better question might be "whom" has God used to "fan the flame" of the gift of faith in you?

3. In verse seven, Paul encourages his spiritual son Timothy with a reminder that, "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

Perhaps Timothy felt timid at times. Share what makes you feel fearful about serving others, about faith, about your church. If you could put away fear and have a spirit of love and self-control, how would it change your life?

Leader's note: The Holy Spirit gives this spirit of Christians seeing in Jesus the perfect and inspiring pattern of love. Paul was telling Timothy that he does not need to worry about being timid when presenting the truth of God's Word (Recall Day One, Ex. 14:14).

- **4.** Paul reminds Timothy of the Gospel (1:9-10) right after he tells him to "not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord" (the Gospel)." Two things might make Timothy (any Christian) ashamed:
 - a. Fear of a world hostile to Christ or
 - b. Failure to see Christ as one's priceless treasure (verse 3) (Source: Armin W. Schuetze, Peoples Bible Commentary, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Concordia Publishing House.)

Which of those reasons is the biggest obstacle for individual Christians (you) to share the Gospel today?

Leader's note: Even Peter denied Christ out of fear of Jesus' enemies. Jesus forgave Peter. Jesus told Peter in reference to his faith, "On this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18 ESV). The one true all powerful God is also the one true God of amazing grace! It is the work of the Holy Spirit to provide the gift of faith.

5. Read Eph. 2:8-10. Many Christians, especially Lutherans, are familiar with verses eight and nine, which refer to the gift of God within us that Paul mentions in 2 Tim. 1:6. But it is Eph. 8:10 that explains WHY we were given the gift of faith. How could someone know what good works God has prepared for him or her to do?

Leader's note: God accomplishing His purposes through us does not depend on us knowing what He is doing or how He is using us or what the result will be. We serve. Sometimes we do get a glimpse of the Lord's hand at work. Sometimes we see His work only with the benefit of hindsight after years of pain-born-wisdom. There are times when we will not know on this side of heaven, and we rest, trusting in God's wisdom, mercy and love.

Apply the Bible Story to Yourselves 🚣



As we near the end of this servant event, it is our hope that this is not a "one and done" kind of experience in your life. We hope that this experience — the work, the friendships, the study, the fun — has lit the spark or fanned the flame of the gift of God that is already in you and that this experience will be the beginning of a pattern in your life. Our theme today is REPEAT. That's how patterns are made. A single event or design happens again and again. See 1:13-14. Paul tells Timothy to:

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

6. What's the pattern?

Leader's note: God works through a person to entrust the Gospel to another and through him or her to another. The Gospel is not to be treated like a valuable item locked away in safe deposit box but the pattern of using God's Word "taught soundly" also is vital. It is the pattern of passing on God's Word in truth and purity that must be repeated so that we do not replace the treasure with a counterfeit.

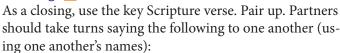
7. What have you learned or experienced this week that could become a pattern in your life?

Leader's note: While many answers may be shared, also note the pattern from the leader's note in question five.

8. What one thing or next step can you plan on doing when you get home that will help you repeat that pattern?

Leader's note: While many answers may be shared, note the pattern from the leader's note in question five.

Closing



Partner No. 1: <u>Name</u>, follow the pattern of sound words you have heard from God's Word in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within you, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

Partner 2: I will, with the help of God.

Optional Closing Songs

Amazing Grace (AGPS 63) Thy Strong Word (AGPS 246) My Faith Looks Up to Thee (LSB 702)

Notes 💆	_			

Day 5: Jesus Stands — Acts 7:54-60 The Stoning of Stephen

Key Scripture ——



"But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56 ESV).

Talk Among Yourselves \$



It seems a little depressing at first glance to end our studies together with the stoning of Stephen. But this little section of Scripture has a remarkable image of Jesus within it that we will highlight. The end is not the end. Stephen's story continues as he arrives to his home in heaven.

- 1. What experience from this week has been most memorable for you?
- 2. What do you look forward to the most as you go home? Who are you excited to tell about this experience?

Read the Story for Yourselves



3. Read Acts 7:54-60 together in any way your group chooses. What stands out for you as you read or hear this section of Scripture?

Leader's note:

Context: Stephen is previously mentioned as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" chosen to help administer care for widows and others (Acts 6:5, 8). He did many signs and wonders and was falsely accused of blasphemy and called before the Sanhedrin. His speech enraged them.

Law and Gospel: Stephen follows the pattern but to human eyes the ending is not a happy one. He isn't miraculously saved. Whenever there is death we see the Law at work. Sometimes we suffer for our own sin. Sometimes we suffer for the sins of others, but God is at work in this story. Saul the persecutor will have his own miraculous meeting with Jesus and the man who watched the coats at Stephen's stoning will spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Stephen does get a miracle. He sees heaven before he dies, and Jesus standing to welcome him home.

4. Take a moment and read Luke 22:66-70. This is Jesus' appearance before the council before He is sentenced to be crucified. Note: Jesus says, "The Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." Compare this to the clear vision God gives Stephen just as he is about to be stoned (Acts 7:55-56). What's the difference?

Leader's note: In Luke 22, Jesus is seated. In Acts 7, He is standing.

- **5.** Stephen receives powerful visible assurance of God's saving presence. Why is Jesus standing? We don't know for sure but a quick check of a commentary yields several suggested reasons:
 - To welcome His faithful witness
 - b. To sustain him in his hour of trial
 - To judge his adversaries
 - d. Or probably all of these

Why do you think Jesus is standing?

(Source: Richard D. Balge, Peoples Bible Commentary, Acts, Concordia Publishing House, 1993.)

6. The "Son of Man" is a term reserved for the Messiah in the Old Testament (Dan. 7:13, 14). In the minds of the Sanhedrin, Stephen, like Jesus, before him had just committed blasphemy. Note what happens in Acts 7:57-58. At whose feet do members of the crowd place their coats? Why is this detail recorded as well as those provided in Acts 8:1-3? How is God working even during these horrific events to make good come from evil? (Peek ahead to Acts 9.)

Leader's note: The crowd "stops their ears" perhaps because they didn't want to hear Stephen's "blasphemous" words. Blasphemy is an act of showing contempt or irreverence for God or of claiming attributes of God. The coats were laid at the feet of Saul, the persecutor, who would soon be meeting Jesus in person on the road to Damascus. God is working out His plan even in the midst of this horrific act.

7. As a result of such horrible persecution, what happens to the Church?

Leader's note: Christians scattered and with them they took the Gospel and the Lord worked to grow His Church.

Apply the Bible Story to Yourselves



- **8.** Stephen prays as he dies, asking God for two things:
 - a. "Lord Jesus receive my spirit" and
 - b. "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Could you pray such a prayer for a person or group that had hurt you so badly?

Leader's note: Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and followed in the pattern of His Savior.

9. Stephen bore his death with dignity and was welcomed by Jesus into heaven. Saul, the persecutor, becomes Paul, the apostle, and would later write In Phil. 3:8:

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Share how you have seen Jesus at work this week?

Closing

In the parable of the talents, Jesus says to the servant who has used the gifts given him wisely:

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master' (Matt. 25:21 ESV).

Stephen entered that joy. Not because of his efforts or his stewardship but because of the gift of life and salvation he received by grace through faith.

Take time to say these words to each other as you end your week of service.

"Well done good and faithful servants!"

Closing Song Options

Soon and Very Soon (AGPS 218) You are My Own (AGPS 270) Oh, that the Lord Would Guild My Ways (LSB 707)

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