



# SERVANT STORIES

2023 SERVANT  EVENTS

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

# SERVANT STORIES

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## PARTICIPANT GUIDE

### Pre-Event Devotion: The Story of All Things

#### OPENING

Stories fill our world. The questions we ask (How are you? Where are you from? etc.) lead to stories. The media we consume (Netflix, TikTok, Instagram, news, etc.) and books we read tell stories. The way we live shapes stories. Who we are and what is to come are centered around a story.

#### THE HEART OF THE STORY

While many stories fill our world, lives and minds, one is the greatest and encapsulates all things. God's story, the Bible, is the story of all things. The story of a God who left the glory of heaven to serve and reconcile all things.

Colossians 1:15–20 tells it:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

God's story is our story. Through Baptism, we are brought into its narrative. Our service begins by being in His Word and rooted in the greatest story of service ever told: Jesus' death, resurrection and reign. Later in Colossians 2:6–7, it is written, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving." In hearing God's story, we are called to live it out and serve one another, our communities and the world.

#### CONVERSATION

- How is God's Story of All Things a story of service?
- What does God's story mean for us as we prepare for this LCMS Servant Event?
- How do you envision how our group can both hear and live the story during our preparations?

#### CLOSING

**Dear Jesus, thank You for Your Word and for making us a part of Your story. Equip us to serve You and live out Your story in the world. Amen.**

Have students place their hands on their hearts and speak this blessing over them: *God's story is your story. Go in peace and serve the Lord with gladness.*

# Pre-Event Bible Study

## THE STORY OF ALL THINGS: A LESSON FROM MARY AND MARTHA

### OBJECTIVES

- To **see** that the story of a servant flows from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- To **sense** that listening, first to God’s Story of All Things, and then to the needs of those whom we serve, is an essential part of servanthood.
- To **celebrate** God’s redeeming and reconciling story for each person.

### INTRODUCTION

Discuss the following scenarios or share a similar experience.

*Distant relatives from another state call to say that they are “passing through” your town and want to “stop by to visit.” It is four o’clock in the afternoon, and they are an hour away from you. They plan to spend the night. Your parents are at work, and you know that you can’t say no.*

- What is your role, and what do you do?

*Your parent’s boss and spouse are coming for dinner. It is important for your parent’s professional career that the evening goes smoothly. Your invited guests are well-known and influential in the community. They live in a lavish home, and this is their first visit to your home. With last-minute tasks not done yet, your guests arrive fifteen minutes early.*

- What is your role, and what do you do?

After discussing the scenarios, talk about:

- What are some differences in your planning and preparing in these two scenarios?
- When might time and energy spent in planning for house guests actually interfere with the visit itself?
- How are careful planning and preparations also reflective of the importance you place on the presence of the guests?

### GOD’S STORY FROM LUKE 10:38–42

The Bible shows us the importance of knowing and being in God’s story. Our service comes from knowing the One who came to serve us. Before we rush to go and do, Jesus reminds us to be in His presence.

*Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” — Luke 10:38–42*

Discuss the following questions.

1. Consider Martha. How, if at all, do you identify with her concerns? How might she have responded differently? Describe what qualities of a servant she demonstrated.
2. Consider Mary. Where did Mary sit, and how might that be significant? How could being a good listener be considered an act of service? What about Mary can we live out in our service?
3. Most importantly, consider Jesus. How did He demonstrate understanding and service to Martha and Mary? What is the one necessary thing? How is it a good portion for Mary and us?
4. How can acts of service cause us to neglect personal time with Jesus and in His Word, the story of all things?
5. In our preparations and during our servant event, how can we encourage one another to keep God’s story at the center of our service?

### REFLECTIONS OF A SERVANT

The leader will provide instructions for the following activity. Use the table below to take notes or aid you in your thinking.

Martha	Mary	Jesus

### MY STORY OF SERVANTHOOD

We all have a place in God’s story. Psalm 139:16 declares, “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were

formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” God writes the story of all things and writes your story. He wants to have a relationship with you. Our story of service begins by spending time in God’s story and growing in relationship with the author and perfecter of our faith (HEBREWS 12:2).

During this Bible study and the five servant event Bible studies, we’ll individually reflect on God’s story. We’ll also share with one another how we see God writing one another’s stories.

Journal prompts:

- Who is someone in your life who reminds you of Martha? How have they demonstrated servanthood to you?
- Who in your life is like Mary? What qualities of a servant do you admire in their life?
- How do Jesus’ words in this story impact you? What might they mean for your story?
- Write a short prayer reflecting on what we have studied today.

### **CALL TO SERVICE AND PRAYER**

Pick a Bible verse that you think would be meaningful to memorize. Speak this passage aloud once each day between now and your next meeting as a means of being in God’s story. Our service begins with our relationship with the One who calls us by name, Jesus.



# Bible Study 1

## A STORY OF SEEING: THE GOOD SAMARITAN

### OBJECTIVES

- To **see** that servanthood is, simply, a response to human need.
- To **sense** that specific needs sometimes expand a servant's response beyond reasonable expectations.
- To **celebrate** God's incomprehensible concern and compassion for people.

### INTRODUCTION

Discuss the following scenarios or share a similar experience.

*You and your household have just arrived at the church for Easter Sunrise worship. You see a woman sitting in a far corner of the parking lot. It is obvious that the woman hasn't bathed for several days, and her clothing is dirty and torn. Your family decides to approach the woman. She appears confused and dazed and asks you what day it is.*

- What do you say, and what do you do?
- Would you consider asking her to join you for worship? Why or why not?

*An elderly widower who lives alone on your block has just experienced extensive storm damage on his property. As a kid, once when you tried to retrieve a baseball thrown inadvertently into his yard, he chased you away and kept the ball. One Halloween night, he slammed the door into your face when you were trick or treating. He has no friends or family and cannot do the upkeep and repairs on his property. Your neighbors have written him off because of his negativity and complaints.*

- How would you respond to this situation?
- Would you consider helping? Why or why not?

After discussing the scenarios,

- Describe your own neighborhood and how you and your household have been "neighborly."
- What is a "bad" neighbor? What is a "good" neighbor?

### GOD'S STORY FROM LUKE 10:25–37

In Jesus' summary of the 10 Commandments in Matthew 22:34–39, the first three commandments deal with our relationship to God, which Jesus redefines simply as "Love the Lord God with your heart, soul, and mind." The remaining seven commandments deal with our relationships with each other. Jesus redefines them simply as, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The Greek word for "love" is agape, which is more than friendly affection; it is a commitment of the human will to God's story and is shown in selfless acts of service. Agape love is an intentional imperative by God, not based on human emotion but on a spiritual desire to fulfill the law of God. It is the love at the heart of God's story, encouraging us to see the needs of those around us.

Read Luke 10:25–29.

- How do these verses seem similar to Matthew 22:34–39?
- If someone were to ask you, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" what would you say?
- What does it mean to "justify" oneself before God or to anyone else? How are we "justified" before God? *In Christ!*

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30–35

- What reasons do you think the priest and Levite might have had for walking by?
- What was the least the Samaritan could have done for the wounded man? Why did he do more than that?
- How does the Good Samaritan reflect God's love for each of us?
- How can you "go and do likewise" in your place in the world?

### REFLECTIONS OF A SERVANT

The leader will provide instructions for the following activity. Use the table below to take notes or aid you in your thinking.

Priest and Levite	Good Samaritan

## MY STORY OF SERVANTHOOD

We all have a place in God's story. Psalm 139:16 declares, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." Our God writes the story of all things and writes your story. He wants to have a relationship with you. Our story of service begins by spending time in God's story and growing in relationship with the author and perfecter of our faith (HEBREWS 12:2).

During each Bible study, we'll individually reflect on God's story, and we'll share with each other how we see God writing one another's stories.

Journal prompts:

- Reflect upon a certain time or circumstance when you ended up doing much more for a particular person than you originally thought your act of service would involve.
- Identify a person in your life who is selfless in showing acts of compassion.
- Reflect upon the lavishness of God's love in your life and how God sees you.
- Reflect upon a specific person who is in need of agape love and what you might say or do to that person as a loving servant of Christ.
- Conclude this journal page with a short prayer appropriate to what you have studied today.

## CALL TO SERVICE AND PRAYER

God sees you and loves you. May He open your eyes to see and serve your neighbors.

He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.  
As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

Psalm 103:10–13



## Devotion 2: Purposeful Movement

### OPENING

A good story includes movement. An epic journey, a rapid chase or a subtle glance from one character to another brings the plot to life. In God's story of all things, He moves toward us, leaving heaven to be born in a humble manger, carrying a cross up a hill, and emptying the grave. Our service is also characterized by movement. We are moved to serve. We go to serve. We use our hands and feet to bring God's story to others.

Play "Spot the Difference."

### THE HEART OF THE STORY

Playing the game required purposeful movement. In God's story, we witness purposeful movement and are commanded to move with purpose as we serve and share the Gospel. Jesus moved with loving purpose to save us. Because He moved toward us, the Spirit enables us to move toward others. In Luke 9, Jesus calls His disciples to be on the move and go for the mission of the kingdom. Luke 9:1–6, 23–25 says,

*And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.*

*And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"*

Like the disciples, we too are called to be on the move in service to Christ and His kingdom. Jesus' ministry began simply in a manger. The disciples began by simply following. You can start simply too. Maybe it means

stepping outside your comfort zone or going somewhere you haven't been before. Maybe it means sacrificing something you want for the good of someone else. With every movement, big or small, God can work His purpose through you.

### CONVERSATION

- What purposeful movements do you notice in the Scripture reading? How might they relate to your servant event?
- How have you experienced Jesus moving in your life, community and where you are serving?
- In what ways can you move with purpose as you serve?

### CLOSING

**Dear Jesus, You moved toward us so that we could be saved. Help us to move in service so Your kingdom would come and Your will would be done. Amen.**

*May God be in your moving, your coming and your going. May you witness His story at work and serve the Lord with gladness.*

## Bible Study 2

### A STORY OF RUTH

#### OBJECTIVES

- To **see** that the acts of going and serving often go hand in hand.
- To **sense** there are opportunities to serve wherever we go.
- To **celebrate** God's going from heaven to earth to save us.

#### INTRODUCTION

Discuss the following scenario or share a similar experience.

*For a couple of months, you and your youth group have been helping to plan a Sunday Serve Day, where everyone in your church will go and serve your local community at various sites. You will be helping to lead the activities at one of the sites. A week and a half before the event, your soccer coach says there will be mandatory team conditioning at the same time.*

- How do you proceed? What do you say, and what do you do?

After discussing the scenario, discuss:

- Why and how did you decide to go on this servant event?
- Many church services conclude by saying, "Go in peace and serve the Lord!" What do you think this looks like?

#### GOD'S STORY FROM RUTH

Whether it is going to the kitchen to do the dishes or going on a mission trip to a faraway place, we are presented with opportunities to serve each step of the way. From leaving her homeland to going to the fields to pick up bits of grain, we see a story of going and serving in the book of Ruth.

Read Ruth. How do you see acts of both going and serving in your assigned chapter of the story?

Discuss the following questions:

- Which character (Ruth? Naomi? Boaz?) in the story do you think is the best example of going and serving? Why?
- How did Ruth step out of her comfort zone? What might stepping out of your comfort zone to go and serve look like for you?
- How does this story point to Jesus?

The story of Ruth shows how God is always on the move for us — coming for us and going after us to redeem us. Ruth gives birth to Obed, the grandfather of King David. Jesus is born from the lineage of David. From heaven to earth He comes, our Redeemer with a ministry marked by going and serving and a call for us to do the same.

#### REFLECTIONS OF A SERVANT

The leader will provide instructions for the following activity. Use the table below to take notes or aid you in your thinking.

Going and Serving	
Ruth 1	
Ruth 2	
Ruth 3	
Ruth 4	
Jesus	

#### MY STORY OF SERVANTHOOD

We all have a place in God's story. Psalm 139:16 declares, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." Our God writes the story of all things and writes your story. He wants to have a relationship with you. Our story of service begins by spending time in God's story and growing in relationship with the author and perfecter of our faith (HEBREWS 12:2).

During each Bible study, we'll individually reflect on God's story, and we'll share with each other how we see God writing one another's stories.

Journal prompts:

- Reflect upon a time you have gone and served. It could be as simple as completing household chores or a large-scale servant event. How did you see God at work?
- Identify a person in your life who has gone out of their way to serve you.
- Reflect upon what it was like for Jesus to go from heaven to earth and the cross to be our Savior.
- Jesus says in Matthew 28, "Go and make disciples." Reflect upon a specific way you can go and serve both today and when you return home.
- Conclude this journal page with a short prayer appropriate to what you have studied today.

#### CALL TO SERVICE AND PRAYER

Pray together:

**"O Lord God, who called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown; Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we are going, but only that Your hand is leading us, and Your love is supporting us, to the glory of Your name."**

*Go in peace and serve the Lord with gladness.*

## Devotion 3: Together in God's Story

### OPENING

Stories often include a cast of characters. Frodo and Sam journey to Mordor. Ron, Harry and Hermione are there for each other at Hogwarts and beyond. Kanga, Piglet, Eeyore and Pooh band together in the Hundred Acre Wood. We witness the power of togetherness and friendship. In fact, we're made for community.

### THE HEART OF THE STORY

We are not alone. That's God's promise and design. Creation wasn't complete until both Adam and Eve were present. Then, it was good. Throughout His story, He demonstrates His divine intention for us to be in a relationship with Him and one another. What sin separates, Jesus puts back together. In Christ, we are never alone. 1 Corinthians 12 describes this reality as the Body of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, 26–27:

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

We live and serve, each of us with a unique role to play in the Body of Christ — all together, all important. Whether in suffering or rejoicing, our service can remind others that they, too, are not alone. God's story has an abundant cast of characters, and His love is for them all, including you.

### CONVERSATION

- How have you experienced or seen the Body of Christ in action?
- What do you think it looks like to both suffer and rejoice together during this servant event?
- How can this group help you to remember that you are not alone?

### CLOSING

**Dear Jesus, thank You for bringing us together to serve. Fill our hearts with Your love and remind us that we are not alone. Amen.**

*Christ is with you. You have a place in His story. You are not alone.*

*Christ is with me. I have a place in His story. I am not alone.*

# Bible Study 3

## A STORY OF FRIENDSHIP: DAVID AND JONATHAN

### OBJECTIVES

- To **see** that friends are also servants to one another.
- To **sense** that friendship involves care, commitment and compassion, risk, reconciliation and renewal.
- To **celebrate** that Jesus is our Friend forever.

### INTRODUCTION

In the same small groups, discuss one or more of the following scenarios or share a similar life experience. Each small group shall appoint a different facilitator than during Parts 1 and 2.

*A new boy comes to your youth group for the first time. He and his family have recently moved to your town and church from another state. He masks his genuine shyness by boasting of past accomplishments. He is hesitant to participate in the activities. His parents forced him to come to youth group, and he tells the group this. Your adult leader asks you to make him feel welcome.*

- What do you say or do?

*You are one of four girls who have been friends for many years. All of your families are also friends. One of the girls begins dating a boy who spreads false stories about their relationship, and her reputation is damaged. It's suggested that you not spend as much time with her as you previously have. The other two girls call you and make plans to hang out, and they don't want to invite the girl in question. You don't want to lose their friendship, and you don't believe the ugly rumors.*

- What do you say or do?

After discussing the scenarios, share:

- What risks are involved in making a friend?
- What are some risks involved in being a friend?

### GOD'S STORY FROM 1 SAMUEL 18–20 AND JOHN 15

Return to the whole group.

Our service is not singular. We serve alongside one another as friends of God. Our shared friendship with Christ means we can be friends to one another and serve each other too. Friends care. Friends are committed to the good

of one another and show each other compassion. Friends risk vulnerability for one another and seek reconciliation and renewal when times are hard. Scripture shows us what this looks like.

### PART 1: DAVID AND JONATHAN'S FRIENDSHIP

One example of friendship in the Bible is found in the story of David and Jonathan. As a group, read together the following passages about David and Jonathan's close friendship.

King Saul, Jonathan's father, was jealous of David's successes as a warrior and of the people's high regard for him, and wanted him dead. As a son and servant of the king, Jonathan could have turned his back on David. Instead, he warned David of Saul's plan to kill him. Jonathan also intervened between his father and David, speaking well of David and evoking a pledge from Saul not to kill David.

- 1 Samuel 18:3: *Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.*
  - This means Jonathan pledged loyalty and political allegiance to David.
- 1 Samuel 19:2–4: *And Jonathan told David, "Saul my father seeks to kill you. Therefore be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything I will tell you." And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you."*
- 1 Samuel 20:32: *Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?"*

Discuss as a group:

- What characteristics of friendship do you see between David and Jonathan?
- How does Jonathan demonstrate care, compassion and commitment to David? Why are these important qualities in a friendship?
- What risk do you see in this story? How is healthy risk a part of friendship?
- Scripture suggests that both David and Jonathan were faithful followers of God. How important is your faith in Christ to the friends you make and have?

## PART 2: OUR FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS

Read John 15:9–17.

*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

- There are at least three reasons why Jesus calls us “friends.” List them.
- How does Jesus distinguish between being a friend and being a servant?
- On the other hand, in what ways are friendship and servanthood interdependent or related?
- At different times and circumstances, how are the following qualities important ingredients for friendship?
  - Care
  - Healthy Risk/Vulnerability
  - Commitment
  - Reconciliation
  - Compassion
  - Renewal

## REFLECTIONS OF A SERVANT

The leader will provide instructions for the following activity. Use the table below to take notes or aid you in your thinking.

Jesus					

## MY STORY OF SERVANTHOOD

We all have a place in God’s story. Psalm 139:16 declares, “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” Our God writes the story of all things and writes your story. He wants to have a relationship with you. Our story of service begins by spending time in God’s story and growing in relationship with the author and perfecter of our faith (HEBREWS 12:2).

During each Bible study, we’ll individually reflect on God’s story, and we’ll share with each other how we see God writing one another’s stories.

Journal prompts:

- Identify in your own mind another person whom you call “friend” and what qualities make up your friendship.
- Identify in your own mind someone either at home or at the Servant Event who seems to be in need of a friend and how you might serve that person.
- Reflect upon a recent time or circumstance when you befriended another person.
- Reflect upon how important it is in your life to know and believe that Jesus is always and forever your friend.
- Conclude this page of your journal with a short prayer appropriate to what you have studied today.

## CALL TO SERVICE AND PRAYER

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
 all our sins and griefs to bear!  
 What a privilege to carry  
 everything to God in prayer!  
 O what peace we often forfeit,  
 O what needless pain we bear,  
 all because we do not carry  
 everything to God in prayer!

## Devotion 4: Conflict and Restoration

### OPENING

At the climax of a story, we can't put the book down or press pause, and the 10-second countdown to the next episode can't end soon enough. We're desperate to see how the conflict is resolved. Will our favorite character survive? Will the lost be found? Will heartbreak find healing? How will all the pieces come together? It might feel like this:

### THE HEART OF THE STORY

In the walk of faith, we face our own moments of yearning to know what's next and how the fragments of life will come together. How will that mistake be made right? When will the anxiety cease? What will make violence stop? In God's story of all things, restoration occurs in the person of Christ and His perfect sacrifice given to heal all creation.

Read Isaiah 53:4–6 and 11:

*Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.*

Jesus comes to bring resolution to every conflict we face. His death and resurrection right the wrongs of the world. Where there is sin, He offers forgiveness. When fear persists, He brings peace. In the midst of tragedy, comfort is found in His loving arms. In Christ, "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (PSALM 30:5B). Jesus is coming again and all things will be restored to perfection forevermore.

### CONVERSATION

- Why do we need both Jesus' death and resurrection in the story?
- What fragments of life are weighing on you today? How can this group support and pray for you in the midst of this?
- When have you experienced God's restoration and joy coming in the morning?

### CLOSING

**Dear Jesus, through Your broken body, wrongs are made right. Through Your resurrection, there is hope in every conflict. While we wait for You to come again, help us to serve and share Your healing love with those in our midst. Amen.**

*Christ restores you. In the midst of brokenness, He says, "I love you." You have a place in His story.*

## Bible Study 4

### A STORY OF SURRENDER: PETER

#### OBJECTIVES

- To **see** that servanthood is a full-time business for the child of God.
- To **sense** that Christ calls and commissions us to be the church's spokespeople and servants.
- To **celebrate** Christ's patient and persevering forgiveness and power.

#### INTRODUCTION

Discuss one or more of the following scenarios or share a similar experience.

*You and your parents have a close, honest and loving relationship. Together, you have a frank discussion about the importance of not vaping. You all agree that it is costly, addictive and harmful to your body. You try hard not to intentionally disobey your parents. You are at a party and most of your friends are vaping. You decide that you want to "try it out" and join them. Later, you feel guilty.*

- What do you say and do with your parents?

*You and your sibling are best friends. You notice he or she seems more tired than normal. You ask what's up and he or she shares they have been staying up most of the night on Discord trying to help a friend battling depression and asks you not to tell anyone. You agree not to tell, and they promise they'll start to try to get more sleep and get help if it's too much. In the middle of the next night, you get up to go to the bathroom and notice your sibling is still awake on their phone. You think your parents or youth leader could help and start to feel both uneasy and betrayed.*

- What do you do and what do you say?

After discussing the scenarios, discuss:

- How are honesty and trust interdependent in a relationship?
- If/when honesty and trust are broken, how may they be restored?

#### GOD'S STORY: PETER

Today, we meet Peter. His story shows God's story of restoration at work in each of our lives. Like Peter, we are called to serve. To understand the relationship between Peter and Jesus and Peter's eventual role in the church, read Matthew 16:13–19.

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people*

*say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Jesus asks a pointed, primary question to the disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" They must know and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Simon, son of Jonah, breaks their silence and makes that confession of faith. Jesus renames this man "Cephas," which is Aramaic for "Peter," which is Greek for "rock." The solid foundation upon which the church is built is not a single individual or even a group of disciples. This confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world is the rock on which the church finds its foundation.

Jesus commissions these disciples with what is called in the Catechism "The Office of the Keys": the Spirit-given power, in the name of Christ, to forgive the sins of those who are repentant and to retain the sins of those who remain unrepentant. Peter and the disciples (for whom Peter speaks in this confession of faith) shall occupy a primary place in the formation of the church; their position is not one of lordship but of ministry.

But Peter still had to learn much more about the heart and mind of Jesus.

Read Luke 22:54–62.

- What is a "pitfall?" (Dictionary definition: "a snare or trap.") What trap did Peter find himself in? Discuss possible situations when we find ourselves ensnared in a particular sin.
- What is a "pratfall?" (Dictionary definition: "a humiliating blunder or mishap.") What was Peter's blunder? Discuss possible situations when we can't "undo" a particular sin.
- List at least three possible messages that the "look of Jesus" conveyed to Peter.

Read John 21:15–19.

- When did this conversation take place?
- What question and command does Jesus repeat to Peter? What is the significance of repeating both the commission and the basis for the commission three times?

- Why does servanthood necessitate a forgiving spirit? Why do we forgive?
- List at least three characteristics which qualified Peter to be a servant.

## CALL TO SERVICE AND PRAYER

You are a child of God, forgiven and called to serve.

## REFLECTIONS OF A SERVANT

The leader will provide instructions for the following activity. Use the table below to take notes or aid you in your thinking.

The Look of Jesus	Peter's Qualifications

## MY STORY OF SERVANTHOOD

We all have a place in God's story. Psalm 139:16 declares, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." Our God writes the story of all things and writes your story. He wants to have a relationship with you. Our story of service begins by spending time in God's story and growing in relationship with the author and perfecter of our faith (HEBREWS 12:2).

During each Bible study, we'll individually reflect on God's story, and we'll share with each other how we see God writing one another's stories.

Journal prompts:

- Spend time reflecting upon a situation when you sincerely confessed your sin and were forgiven in Christ's name, and how that experience enabled you to forgive someone else.
- Reflect on how forgiveness and servanthood are interrelated.
- Reflect upon an opportunity you had to "feed a lamb" (i.e., another person) through a word or act of service recently.
- Reflect on what Christ's unqualified forgiveness in your daily life means to you.
- Conclude this page of your journal with a short prayer appropriate to what you have studied today.



## Devotion 5: The Hero

### OPENING

What makes a hero in a story?

The refrain to an '80s classic by Bonnie Tyler goes, "I need a hero. I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night." Perhaps we feel this sentiment too. Amid vast issues and many unknowns, our world is in constant search of a hero to save the day. When we can't find one in real life, we turn to a streaming service and get lost in the narratives of heroes on the screen. We want to know in the end that it will be alright.

### THE HEART OF THE STORY

As people of God, we know the Hero. We know the ending of the story, that's really a beginning: Jesus and His reign forevermore. By faith, we have a part in the story and good news to share in a hero-hungry world.

Read Hebrews 12:1–3.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

Looking to the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us and Jesus who reigns, we are called to run the race of faith bringing the goodness of His kingdom to others. He conquered sin, death and the power of the devil on the cross to make His story of all things our story too.

### CONVERSATION

- Who is a hero and witness of faith in your life?
- What weight do you need God's help to lay aside in order for you to better serve?
- How can the picture of Jesus reigning over all things change the way you see the world?

### CLOSING

**Dear Jesus, You reign as the Hero of all things. Help us to lay aside what weighs us down and forgive our sins. Enable us to serve You each and every day with joy and endurance. Amen.**

*Christ reigns over all your story. Your story is His story.*

# Bible Study 5

## A STORY OF TWO KINGDOMS: JESUS REIGNS

### OBJECTIVES

- To see that our service is a piece in God’s story.
- To sense that serving brings God’s kingdom to others.
- To celebrate God’s everlasting love and reign over all things.

### INTRODUCTION

Share moments you have seen God at work through your service in the past week.

After sharing, discuss:

- How will you share these moments of God’s story in your life when you return home from this servant event?

### GOD’S STORY FROM REVELATION 21:1–6

God is always working. He has the details of the story figured out. He’s been writing them through you and will continue until Christ’s return. We live in the “now and the not yet.” We pray in the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” But what does this mean? The Small Catechism explains,

*The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also. How does God’s kingdom come? God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.*

In the days of waiting for His coming, as believers, we have our feet in two kingdoms. J. M. Weidenschilling writes,

*Every person is a subject of two kingdoms, one of which is spiritual, the other earthly. ... Faith in Christ alone makes a person a member of His kingdom, or the Church. Through Baptism we already entered this heavenly kingdom; through the means of grace we are kept in “the communion of saints.” Whoever remains outside of this kingdom will be lost eternally. Therefore our chief concern must be to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,” to remain in faith unto the end.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> J. M. Weidenschilling, “The Christian: A Citizen of Two Kingdoms” in *Christian Citizenship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953). Access the text at: <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/e18hHdYkjEihx7N6CqskbVxP3TgW2UhB>

Revelation paints a picture of the ending when the brokenness of our earthly kingdom will no longer exist.

Read and discuss Revelation 21:1–6.

- What picture in these verses most stands out to you? Why?
- What characteristics would you use to describe the two kingdoms (the heavenly and the earthly)?
- While we wait for this reality, what does Christ call us to be and do?
- How can you point others to God’s kingdom beyond this servant event?

### REFLECTIONS OF A SERVANT

Weidenschilling continues,

*As citizens of Christ’s spiritual kingdom it is our duty “to serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life” (LUKE 1:75). ... Even though we live in this world, we are not to be of the world (JOHN 15:19, 17:16; 1 JOHN 5:4). ... However, from the nature of our heavenly citizenship and from our duties toward Christ and His Church it does not follow that this prevents us from being loyal to the country in which we live. ... As Christians, we are obliged to be good citizens on earth, and because we serve Christ, we are all the better able to serve our country.*

The reality of Jesus’ heavenly reign empowers and encourages us as we live here on earth. The leader will provide instructions for the following activity. Use the table below to take notes or aid you in your thinking.

	Heavenly kingdom	Earthly kingdom
Characteristics		
Practices of a citizen		

### MY STORY OF SERVANTHOOD

We all have a place in God’s story. Psalm 139:16 declares, “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” Our God writes the story of all things and writes your story. He wants to have a relationship with you. Our story of service begins by spending time in God’s story and growing in relationship with the author and perfecter of our faith (HEBREWS 12:2).

During each Bible study, we'll individually reflect on God's story, and we'll share with each other how we see God writing one another's stories.

Journal prompts:

- Reflect upon this servant event. How have you witnessed God's kingdom come?
- Imagine eternal life with no more death, tears or pain.
- Reflect upon how you can bring God's kingdom when you return home.
- Jesus says in Matthew 6 to seek first the kingdom of God. Reflect on things you seek over Him and what it would look like to seek God first each day.
- Conclude this journal page with a short prayer appropriate to what you have studied today.

*Write in the affirmation books of other participants.*

### **CALL TO SERVICE AND PRAYER**

Pray together the Lord's Prayer and sing the Doxology.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host:  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen