

The JOY of Living Love

LCMS SERVANT EVENT **BIBLE STUDY (LEADER'S GUIDE)**



“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!”

(Psalm 100:1-2 ESV)

 **THE LUTHERAN CHURCH**
Missouri Synod
Youth Ministry

Leader's Guide

Objective

By the power of God's Spirit working through His Word participants will better understand and appreciate God's love and service to them in His Son Jesus Christ and be empowered to respond more eagerly, willingly and joyfully to His gracious call to serve Him and others as Christ has first served them.

Group Guidelines

These Bible studies have been developed for use in small groups of five to seven people. Group leaders are responsible for initiating and stimulating discussion, keeping the group moving along through the study, keeping it focused on the "main points" highlighted in the material, and for making sure that each person in the group has the opportunity to share and feels comfortable doing so.

Personal preparation on the part of the leader (including prayer and careful study of the material) is essential for helping to ensure lively, meaningful, and focused study and discussion in the small group. In most cases, there is more than enough material available for use in the allotted time (assumed to be between 45 and 60 minutes). Although some suggestions are included in this guide for adapting the study to varying time frames, the leader will need to make decisions ahead of time about which questions, Bible passages and activities to focus on and which may be touched on lightly or even omitted because of lack of time.


The main goal each day is to help participants to see and understand more clearly:


1. God's great love for them and service to them in Jesus Christ; and
2. How God's Spirit enables and empowers them, through Word and Sacrament, to respond to this love living a joyful life of service to Christ and others.

No attempt has been made in the materials themselves to connect these studies explicitly with the morning devotions but the leader may want to look for ways to do this if it seems natural and appropriate. The leader is also encouraged to look for ways to personalize these studies by relating them, whenever possible, to daily activities and experiences of the servant event itself.

Bible Study Parts

Following the **Introduction**, each study is divided into four parts:

 **1. Talk Among Yourselves** contains a brief story or illustration, which is intended to break the ice and create some initial discussion related to the study itself. Everyone should be encouraged to join this discussion, but care also should be taken to not let this part of the study take too much time (five to eight minutes is probably a good target time).

 **2. Read the Story for Yourself** gets the participants into the text of Scripture itself and raises questions about the meaning of the passages. Although questions of personal application sometimes appear in this section, the main goal here is to focus on the biblical material itself. Personal application of the material comes primarily in the next section.

- Participants should be encouraged to join in the reading of the Scripture story and to share their thoughts, questions and insights about the meaning of the text.
- Leaders should not be embarrassed to say, "I don't know," or "I'll ask someone else about that," if a question comes up to which they don't know the answer.
- Keep discussion focused on the clear, simple truths of Scripture. Don't be distracted or consumed by difficult questions or off-topic issues.
- Move through this material at a steady pace, focusing on the questions and Bible passages that are most meaningful to you and to the other members of the group.
- Be flexible in your use of the material and don't feel that you have to thoroughly discuss (or even make use of) every single question or Bible passage.
- Strive to emphasize the main point(s) in this section.
- Supporting information, comments and suggestions are offered in bold print in this guide to help leaders in their preparation and use of this material.

- The target time for covering the material in this section is about 15 to 20 minutes.



3. Apply the Story to Yourself encourages participants to apply the truths that emerged in the second section to their own lives and current goals, experiences and activities. Again, the leader will have to make decisions about where to focus the discussion and how to best engage the group in various activities suggested here.

In cases where instructions are given to “make a list” etc., it may be helpful to appoint a scribe for the day and have paper and markers available to do this in a way that involves the whole group.

Regardless of which questions the leader focuses on in this section, it would be good to conclude this section each day with the final question, which typically asks participants to share at least one thing that they learned or found particularly meaningful in that day’s study. An approximate target time for covering this material is 15 to 20 minutes.



4. Closing is designed as a devotional time of prayer and praise to the Lord. The target time here is 5 to 8 minutes. The suggestions given to the study for using this material can be adapted to meet the needs and comfort level of your group. For example, you may wish to choose different songs than those suggested from the music resources recommended in the study. This includes *All God’s People Sing* (AGPS), CPH #97-6453; the *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB), CPH #03-1170; and *Singing Saints Songbook* (SSS), CPH #97-6917. You may also want to handle the prayer time in a way that better fits the personality and dynamics of your group.

God’s blessings and joy on your service as Bible study leader!

- The Rev. Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer
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Introduction

(See page two in the participant study guide.)

In this series of Bible studies, we will review five scriptural stories of people who were called out of some particular place or situation by God and into service to Him and to others.

Day 1 Bible Study:

The Runaway Son – Luke 15:11-32

Day 2 Bible Study:

The Rich Young Man – Mark 10:17-31

Day 3 Bible Study:

The Calling of Levi (Matthew) – Mark 2:13-17

Day 4 Bible Study:

A Visit to Mary and Martha – Luke 10:38-42

Day 5 Bible Study:

The Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37

Although these stories may be familiar to you, you will be encouraged to look and pray for new insights and new ways of applying the truths contained in these stories to your own life and calling to be God’s servant. As you read and listen ask yourself:

- What do I share in common with the people in these stories?
- How are their calls to serve like mine?
- How do these stories relate to my participation in this servant event and beyond?

The goal, above all, is that you will come face to face each day in these pages of Scripture with Christ Himself who says both as our Savior and Teacher:

“But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45 ESV).

The Runaway Son

(See page three in the participant study guide.)

Talk Among Yourselves

Have you ever run away from home? Once upon a time when I was about 12, I got so mad at my parents (I don't remember why), I decided that enough was enough. I packed a lunch, hopped on my bicycle and said goodbye to home forever ... or at least for a few hours. As late afternoon turned to evening on that chilly day in February, I realized from my seat on the school playground's merry-go-round that my plan to leave home forever had a few holes in it. What was I going to eat now that my lunch was gone? Where was I going to sleep? And who was going to take care of my paper route the next morning? Somewhat sheepishly, I headed back home only to discover that nobody in the family even realized I had "run away" in the first place. Talk about a humbling (humiliating!) experience.

Of course, running away can be a much more serious (and dangerous) matter. Some teenage runaways have had tragic, life-threatening (even life-destroying) experiences. Today's Bible study focuses on a story Jesus told about a young man who ran away from home and almost ruined his life forever. But ...

Read the Story for Yourself

Read the story of "The Runaway Son" (usually called "The Lost Son" or "The Prodigal Son") from Luke 15:11-32. You may want to take turns reading to get everyone more involved in the story as it unfolds.

Spend a few minutes just talking about the story as a group. What one thing in particular "jumped out" at you as you heard and read this familiar story once again?

For further discussion, use the following questions and observations:

1. It isn't completely clear from this story exactly why the younger son left. Are there any hints in the story that might help explain this? Do you have any ideas of your own?

Considering the bad attitude of the older son revealed in verses 25-30, it's possible that part of the reason the younger son left was because of a strained relationship with his (bossy and self-righteous) brother. It's also possible, of course, that he was just caught up in the desire and temptation to "sow his wild oats." Since

Scripture doesn't clearly answer this question, feel free to allow group members to share their own ideas.

2. Re-read verse 13 and complete the following sentence: "In my opinion, the younger son was really _____." What specific activities do you think his wild living might have involved? (See, for example, verse 30.)

The sentence above may be completed with words ranging from "stupid" to "selfish" to "searching" to "confused." Some participants may even identify or sympathize with the younger son depending on their opinions about why he left. Such identification should not be discouraged. Spiritually speaking we are all runaway sons and daughters of God who have been called home by His grace and forgiveness.

3. According to verses 15-16, where did the runaway son end up? If this story were "modernized" for today's society, what are some of the jobs or situations we might use to describe how or where he ended up?

4. Re-read verse 17. What do you think brought the younger son back to his senses? What facial expression would you use to convey the exact moment when his brain returned to functioning properly?

Consider giving a "Best Actor/Actress Award" for the best expression.

5. Look again at verses 18-19. Do you think the son is really and truly sorry for what he has done or is he just motivated by selfish desperation? Explain your answer. Does verse 21 help us in answering this question?

It may be possible to answer the question in different ways although the son's actions and words in verse 21 seem to indicate true sincerity on his part. Our repentance, no matter how sincere, is never perfect. It may be worth emphasizing at some point that as important as true repentance is, God's forgiveness is not based on the perfect sincerity of our repentance but on His grace in Jesus Christ alone.

6. What word does the Bible often use to describe a person's recognition of his or her wrong and foolish behavior and the desire to turn one's life around? (See, for example, Luke 5:32.)

*Depending on the interest and background of group members, the leader may wish to spend some time discussing the various meanings or components of the word "repentance" (sorrow over sin; faith in Christ; desire to change one's sinful life. See **Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation**, 1991, Questions 272-276.)*

7. Look carefully at Verses 20-24 and make a list of all the things the father did that showed how much he loved his long-lost son. Did the son deserve this kind of love? How do you think the son reacted to his father's outpouring of love? Try to put yourself in the father's shoes for a moment. Do you think you would have responded this way?

Specific answers may vary but be sure to focus here on the undeserved love of the father and how this love was expressed in very concrete, tangible ways (like God's love for us in Christ).

8. Review Verses 25-31. What was the older son's reaction to his brother's return home? Do you think this reaction was justified? Do you think you would have felt the same way? Do you think the father was showing favoritism to the younger son or was his reaction right and fair? (Note the father's response to the older son in Verses 31-32.)

*The question may need to be omitted if time is limited but there is potential here for some very fruitful discussion if time allows. "Favoritism" (or perceived favoritism) may be a real and sensitive issue in some families. There is opportunity here to allow participants to express these feelings while also stressing the depth and sincerity of the father's love for **both** sons, despite the sinful attitudes and/or actions of **both** sons.*

Apply the Story to Yourself

Obviously, Jesus didn't tell this story merely to entertain us. He told this story to teach us some very important truths about ourselves and about our relationship with God and others. Before discussing the questions below, jot down group members' answers to the question, "What do you think Jesus is trying to teach us through this story?"

Encourage honest sharing of brief one-phrase or one-sentence answers to this point and consider

having a scribe jot them down on paper to be used for reflection and discussion as the study progresses.

Each of us has some very important things in common with the runaway son. Use the verses listed below to unscramble the garbled words. Then spend some time discussing the questions that follow.

The unscrambling can be done as a group activity, as a contest, or handled in some other way. It is meant to be a fun activity, followed by some "serious" discussion of basic yet crucial spiritual truths.

1. Like the runaway son, each of us is a "**roop slime-bear niners**." (Rom. 3:23)

Unscrambled answer: "poor miserable sinner." (Consider "quizzing" members on if and where they have heard that phrase before. It may be familiar to many from the confession of sins used in several Sunday morning orders of worship.)

2. Why is it so important to understand this core Scriptural truth? Without getting too personal, share one or two specific ways in which God has helped you see and understand the seriousness of your sinful condition. Do you think most people today see themselves as "sinners" in need of God's help and salvation? Discuss.

As an additional "quiz" exercise you may want to challenge members to fill in the blank from the following Luther quote: "If you want to engage profitably in the study of theology and Holy Scriptures and do not want to run head-on into a Scripture closed and sealed, then learn, above all things, to understand _____ rightly."

The answer, somewhat surprisingly, is not "grace" or "God's love" or "the Gospel" but rather "sin"! According to Martin Luther (and the Bible!), if a person does not understand the seriousness of their sinful condition, they will never be able to understand their great need for a Savior. Where there is no sin there can be no forgiveness of sin! On the other hand, the more we understand the seriousness of our sin, the more we will appreciate and treasure God's undeserved love and forgiveness in Christ.

3. Like the runaway son, we are all God's "**ricesoup, vofinger endlihr**c" through faith in Jesus Christ. (1 John 2:12; 3:1)

Unscrambled answer: "precious, forgiven children." The story of the runaway son does not, of course, specifically mention Jesus Christ nor does it contain a

character representative of Christ. Certainly, however, our Lord intended us to see the connection between the father's gracious treatment of the son in the story and our heavenly Father's gracious treatment of us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

4. Name one Scripture passage, person or experience that God has used recently to help you better understand His overwhelming and all-forgiving love for you in Christ.

The leader may wish to begin the discussion by sharing a favorite Bible passage that speaks of God's grace in Christ or by sharing a personal story about someone or some event that God used to communicate or demonstrate the Gospel message.

5. Like the runaway son, we are all called to respond to God's gracious love in Christ by "**gervsin, volnig and gingivrof rotshe**" as He has first done for us. (Eph. 4:32-5:1)

Unscrambled answer: "serving, loving and forgiving others." This, too, is an application that is not explicit in the story, but can surely be inferred and is entirely consistent with what the rest of Scripture teaches about our Spirit-empowered response to God's undeserved love and forgiveness.

6. We aren't told in Luke 15 specifically how the runaway son responded to his father's forgiving love in the weeks and months following his return home. Do you think there was a change in his attitude? In his relationship with his father? In his relationship with his older brother? Do you think everybody lived "happily ever after" or do you think they still have to work through some family struggles and squabbles?

This may be a good opportunity to make the point that while the Holy Spirit indeed calls us to be "imitators of God," we should not be surprised or discouraged by our (or others') apparent lack of "progress"

at times. While our justification (salvation) is a completed act in Christ, our sanctification (the new life that we strive to live with the help of God's Spirit) is a lifelong process that will not be perfected until we reach our heavenly home.

7. Are there people in your life right now whom you find easy to love, serve and forgive? Why? Are there people whom you find it difficult to love, serve and forgive? Why?

8. Read Eph. 5:1 one more time. Then, read 1 John 4:7-12; 19-21. What motivates and empowers us as Christians in our daily struggle to love and serve others?

John says it best: We love because He first loved us! It is always the Gospel (God's gracious love in Christ) not the Law that motivates and empowers us in our Christian living. The Law helps us to understand what God wants us to do but it is the Gospel that makes us want to do it and gives us the power to do it!

9. Name one thing that you learned in this Bible study that will help you to be a better "servant" to others this week and in the weeks to come.

Closing

Allow a few moments of silence at the end of the study for each person to compose a brief prayer thanking God for His undeserved love and forgiveness in Christ, and for God's help in loving, serving and forgiving the specific "others" whom God brings into each of our lives. Provide an opportunity for those who wish to do so to share their prayer aloud.

Close by singing "Amazing Grace" (AGPS 63, LSB 744).

The Rich Young Man

(See page six in the participant study guide.)

Talk Among Yourselves

In his short story, “How Much Land Does a Man Need?,” Russian author Leo Tolstoy tells the tale of a once-contented farmer named Pahom who, tempted by the devil, becomes obsessed with his “need” for more and more land. The farmer’s craving finally leads him to the distant lands of certain nomadic chieftains who offer him a deal that sounds too good to be true. In exchange for a rather modest fee, they promise to give him as much land as he can surround by walking in one day. There is only one catch: If he fails to return to his starting point by the time the sun sets, he will lose both the land and his money.

The next day at sunrise, Pahom sets out in the presence of the chieftains, eager to encompass as much of the rich and fertile land as he possibly can. The further he walks, the better the land looks. So, with one eye on the sun, he keeps marking out a larger and larger tract of land. As the day wears on and the sun begins to sink, Pahom grows tired, thirsty, hungry, sore and weak. He begins to worry that he may not have the strength or the time to make it back to the starting point by sunset. He may lose all that he set out to gain. Straining and struggling with all of his might, Pahom runs and stumbles and scratches his way back to where he began, collapsing at the feet of the chieftains just as the last glimmer of sunlight fades below the horizon. He has made it! The land is his! But as the chieftains applaud his effort, the farmer’s servant makes a shocking discovery: Pahom is dead.

The story ends: “His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.”

What is the “moral” of this story? (Take turns answering this question in your group.)

Today’s Bible story centers on a young man who was also caught up in the deceptive and dangerous “rat race” for “more.” This man was very wealthy, influential and successful, and apparently, very miserable. He had achieved impressive earthly goals but somehow along the way, he had lost sight of the most important goal of all. Jesus tried to help get him back on the right track, but ...

Read the Story for Yourselves

Read the account of “The Rich Young Man” recorded in Mark 10:17-31. (If time allows, consider comparing Mark’s version of the text with the parallel accounts in Matt. 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30). Before moving ahead to the discussion questions below, take turns completing the following sentence: “What I find most meaningful (or troublesome or comforting or confusing) about this story is ...”

Allow participants to freely share their thoughts at this point without too much discussion. Some of the ideas that emerge here will be picked up on again as the group moves through the study.

Although Mark does not tell us exactly who this rich man was, Luke 18:18 says that he was a “ruler” (probably some kind of high-ranking government official). Matt. 19:20 adds another detail by telling us that he was “young.” He had achieved great earthly success at a surprisingly early age.

1. Can you think of some “young people” in today’s society who have become very wealthy, famous and successful? How have they handled their success so far? Would you like to trade places with them? Why or why not?
2. What question did this “rich young ruler” ask Jesus (verse 17)? What does this question tell us about him? Do you think he was trying to fool or impress Jesus or do you think he was seriously interested in Jesus’ answer to this question? (Give the reason(s) for your answer.)
3. Why do you think Jesus says what He says in verse 18? Was Jesus upset about being called “good”?

The young man’s question suggests that he was seriously interested in “spiritual things” and concerned about his eternal destiny. This is a positive thing! Even though the story ends on a disappointing note (as far as this young man is concerned), there is nothing in the text to suggest that he was merely “testing” Jesus or trying to trap him (as the Pharisees and Sadducees often did).

4. What do you think of Jesus' response in verse 19? Is Jesus suggesting the key to inheriting eternal life is keeping the commandments? If not, why does Jesus point this man to the commandments?

Obviously, Jesus is not suggesting that eternal life can be earned by keeping the commandments. Jesus knows, however, that this is what this rich, young man thinks. Therefore, He challenges the man to take a good, hard look in the "mirror" of God's Law: Have you really kept the commandments? Have you kept them perfectly?

5. How does this man respond to Jesus' words (verse 20)? What does this response tell us about him? Do you think this answer pleased Jesus? Why or why not? If not, what answer do you think Jesus wanted to hear?

Although the man's answer certainly didn't surprise Jesus, who sees the hearts and minds of all, it didn't please Him either. God wants us to keep the commandments, but more importantly, He wants us to be able to recognize and admit that we have not kept (and cannot keep) them perfectly. Once we recognize this, then Jesus can help us. He can say, "I have Good News for you! I have come to save sinners just like you!"

6. Which commandment is the "key" to all the other commandments? (For a hint, see Matt. 22:37-38.) Re-read verses 21-22. On the basis of these verses, what would you say was this man's "god"? What was Jesus' attitude toward this proud, self-centered, materialistic (and sad and searching) young man? (See verse 21.)

The key to all the other commandments is the First Commandment. If we fear, love and trust in God above all things, then we will also seek to obey all of God's other commands. The rich young man's fundamental problem was not that he had too much money, but that he had the wrong God. Instead of loving and trusting God above all things, he loved and trusted his money. His greatest "fear" was not losing God and eternal life, but losing his precious riches and possessions. Despite all this, Jesus loved this young man deeply, as He loves all people. By challenging him to sell his possessions, Jesus provided him with yet another opportunity to do some deep and necessary "soul searching" about what is really important in this life — and the next.

7. The Bible doesn't tell us the rest of the story. It doesn't tell us what happened to this young man in the days and months and years after he walked away from Jesus. In your opinion, is there any reason to hope that this story finally had a happy ending? Explain your answer.

This is really a matter of opinion, but in view of what the text tells us about this man's interest in spiritual things and the seriousness of his conversation with Jesus, it is certainly not impossible that at some point in the future, perhaps at a time of financial loss or crisis, that Jesus' words "hit home" and brought about a change of heart and life.

Apply the Story to Yourselves

1. Reflect again on Tolstoy's story, "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" Why do you think it is so easy for people to get caught up in the "rat race" or desire for more money and more "stuff"? How does today's world try to fool us into thinking that the key to happiness is to have more and more money and more and more "things"? (Be specific!) Do you ever catch yourself getting caught up in this "worldly" way of thinking? (Give specific examples.)

2. Re-read Mark 10:23-25. What do you think Jesus means by these words? Are these words of warning intended only for millionaires like Donald Trump or do they also apply to us? If so, how?

The point of Jesus' words is that because of the natural inclination toward greed and materialism that exists in the heart of every sinful person (including us), it is very hard, actually impossible, for anyone to be willing on their own to sacrifice everything to follow Jesus. A person doesn't have to be rich to be greedy and materialistic. These words remind us of this dangerous temptation that lurks deep within all of our hearts and of the grace of God that has done the "impossible" in our lives.

3. The following sentences are incorrect as written. Use the Bible passages listed to correct each sentence. Then, spend a few minutes discussing what was wrong about the original sentence and what is right about the revised sentence.

"Money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 13:5)

Not money but the love of money is the root of all evil. There's a big difference.

"You cannot serve God and have money at the same time." (Matt. 6:24)

You cannot serve both God and money at the same time and in the same way. You can serve God and have money but you cannot have more than one God.

“People who are rich will fall into spiritual destruction.” (1 Tim. 6:9)

Those destined for spiritual destruction are not the rich but those who want to be rich, those who regard the accumulation of wealth and riches as their ultimate goal in life.

4. Do you have to be “rich” to love money or can a “poor person” be as greedy as a “rich person”? What is the solution to the universal human problem of greed and materialism? (See Mark 10:26-27). How has God accomplished the impossible in the lives of His followers? (Read, for example, Eph. 2:1-10.)

See the comments under Question 2 above. Leaders are strongly encouraged to take the time to read Eph. 2:1-10 with the group because of its clear presentation of the Gospel and its reminder of the connection between God’s grace and our new life in Christ.

5. Note Jesus’ promise to the rich man in verse 21 and His promise to the disciples in verses 29-30. Now read Matt. 6:19-21. What are some of the heavenly treasures that belong to those who trust in Jesus? Who paid for these treasures and how? (See 2 Cor. 8:9 and review Luther’s explanation to the second article of the Creed.) List as many ways as you can that these heavenly treasures are superior to earthly wealth and treasure.

This question offers another excellent opportunity to focus on the simple and beautiful Gospel message of Christ’s life, death and resurrection on our behalf. The leader is encouraged to be prepared to share (or recite together, if possible) with the group the words of Luther’s explanation of the second article of the Creed (Small Catechism, Page 14) with its contrast between “silver and gold” and “the holy, precious blood” of Jesus Christ. Included among the heavenly treasures that are ours in Christ are the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, peace, joy, hope, freedom from guilt, power over the devil, victory over death and hell, a new and abundant life, fellowship with God and other Christians, the gifts and fruit of the Spirit — the list goes on and on!

Because of the length of this study, the leader may want to choose one of the following discussion questions (six, seven or eight) instead of trying to cover them all. Try to leave time, however, for brief discussion of Questions 9 and 10.

6. Sometimes we say, “I need this or that,” when we really mean, “I want this or that.” What’s the difference between our “wants” and our “needs”? What, according to the Bible, is our greatest need of all? (Check Luke 12:16-21). What promise does God give us regarding our needs? (See Phil. 4:19.)
7. A rich and famous singer/actress (who dubbed herself “The Material Girl”) was once asked for her opinion on a variety of subjects. When asked her opinion on happiness, she said, “I don’t know anyone who’s happy.” Compare her answer to the reaction of the rich young man in Mark 10:22. What is the solution to the sadness and joylessness of life in today’s world? What is not the solution? How can we share this solution with others?
8. Jesus doesn’t necessarily ask each of us, like He asked the rich young man, to sell everything we have before following Him. But following Jesus does give us a whole new perspective on how to view and use our money and possessions. What do the following passages teach us about how Christ’s followers are to regard and use their earthly wealth and possessions? (See Mark 10:21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Phil. 4:12-13; 2 Cor. 9:10-13; and James 2:14-17.)
9. Read the final verse of today’s Bible story again (Verse 31). Is this a warning, a promise or a combination of both?
- For those who seek to be “first” in this world, Verse 31 is a warning that they will be “last” in God’s eyes. For those who are content to be “last” in the eyes of the world because of their faith in Christ, Verse 31 is a precious promise that they will be first in the kingdom of heaven. While many strive for wealth and status in this world, we join the rich and rewarding race toward eternal life, which Christ has already won for us (2 Tim. 4:7-8)!*
10. Share one meaningful insight that you gained from today’s study. Tell how it connects with your participation in this servant event.

Closing

As a closing prayer, read and reflect on the song, “I’d Rather Have Jesus” by Rhea F. Miller, 1922.

I’d rather have Jesus than silver or gold,
I’d rather have His than have riches untold.
I’d rather have Jesus than houses or land,
I’d rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.

Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame
I'd rather be true to His holy name.

He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom,
He's sweeter than honey from out of the comb
He's all that my hungering spirit needs,
I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead.

Close by singing together "Christ Be My Leader" (AGPS 81, LSB 861).

DAY 3 BIBLE STUDY > Mark 2:13-17

The Calling of Levi (Matthew)

(See page ten in the participant study guide.)

Talk Among Yourselves

Imagine for a moment that you were offered a job as a tollbooth clerk in the middle of nowhere on some interstate highway. The pay is fabulous but there's one catch: You have to agree to remain at the same job for all of your live-long (working) days. Would you take the job? In trying to come to a decision, what would you list as some of the pros and cons of a job like this?

One of the words that probably showed up on the con side of your list is the word "lonely." Imagine spending every day cooped up in a tiny little booth with no one around with whom you can talk, laugh, eat, or share your thoughts and problems. Your only interaction with people comes during that brief moment when you collect their money. It's not exactly the best opportunity for forming deep and lasting personal relationships.

In today's Bible story we meet a tollbooth worker whose life was probably quite boring, depressing and lonely despite the considerable financial rewards that he undoubtedly reaped from his work. Then, one day Jesus came along ...

Read the Story for Yourselves

Read the story of the calling of Levi (Matthew) in Mark 2:13-17. Take a few moments to compare the brief parallel accounts in Matt. 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-32. Before moving ahead to the following questions, take turns completing the following sentence: "I think Jesus called Matthew to follow Him because ..."

Leaders may want to have someone jot down answers received on paper to compare with answers that emerge as the study progresses.

The Bible doesn't give us many details about Levi's life before he met Jesus. But from what we know about tax collecting and tax collectors at the time of Jesus, we can make a few educated guesses.

For example, Jewish tax collectors were typically regarded as traitors and outcasts by their own people, since they collected taxes from their (often poor) fellow countrymen to support the hated Roman government and the Romans' (usually rich) nobles and officials. So despised were tax collectors by their own people that they were barred from serving as judges or even witnesses in a trial. They also were expelled from the synagogue (the Jewish center for worship). Even the families of tax collectors were often shunned and rejected.

1. Have you ever felt like an "outcast," like you were not wanted or accepted by a certain group of people (at school, at work, or even in your church or family)? Briefly describe the situation and tell how you felt. How did you handle the situation? What did you learn from the experience?

Jewish tax collectors were usually quite wealthy partly because the Romans had to pay a hefty salary to get someone to do their "dirty work" of collecting taxes and partly because nearly all tax collectors helped fill their own pockets by charging people more than they really owed or by "skimming" some of the tax money to keep for themselves. (See, for example, the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-9, especially Verse 8).

2. Why do you think Jesus would call a "traitor" and probable "cheater" like Matthew (or Zacchaeus) to be His follower? (Hint: See Luke 19:10 and Mark

2:17.) How does the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14 help us understand the reason why Jesus came? What is required of those who want to follow Jesus?

Although Matthew, like all of us, undoubtedly had some “natural” gifts and talents that could be put to use in new and better ways as a disciple of Christ, Jesus called Matthew to serve Him, not because of his gifts and talents, but simply because that’s why Jesus came: to seek and to save those who are lost. Jesus called Matthew to follow Him because Jesus loved Matthew. And that’s why He has called us! What is “required” of us also is given to us by the power of God’s Spirit working through God’s Law and Gospel; first, the willingness to confess sin and our need for Jesus, and then to trust in His promise to meet our need for forgiveness and salvation.

3. Now it’s time for a tough personal question: Have you ever lied, cheated or been dishonest in any way? What comfort and encouragement do you find in the story of Matthew’s call? According to 1 John 1:8-2:2 what’s the right way (and the wrong way) to handle sin in our life?

The point here is not to embarrass anyone or make them feel uncomfortable but to underscore the fact that we, like Matthew, must come to terms with our sin before we can receive and appreciate God’s forgiveness. (The leader should be sensitive in handling this question, however, and may want to break the ice by being the first to confess personal sins or struggles in this area.) Be sure to read 1 John 1:8-2:2 and emphasize the need for “daily contrition and repentance” as we live out our Baptism in Christ day by day (Small Catechism, Pages 22-23).

4. Mark and Luke use the name Levi to refer to the tax collector in our story while Matthew uses the name Matthew in telling the story of his call to follow Jesus. Many commentators believe that Levi was Matthew’s given name while “Matthew” (which means “gift of God”) was a new name chosen by Matthew the apostle or even by Jesus Himself in response to Matthew’s new life in Christ. Why do you think Matthew preferred this name over the name Levi? In what sense are we all “Matthews”? (See, for example, Romans 6:23.)

Matthew’s name, “Gift of God,” was undoubtedly a constant reminder to him and others that his very life was a “gift of God”: a gift from God through his new relationship with Christ and a gift to God out of gratitude for his new life in Christ. The same is true for

all of us who have been called out of the despair and loneliness of our sin to a brand new life in Christ.

5. True or False: According to this story, the Pharisees were delighted that Jesus was able to convince Matthew to give up his “dirty job” as a tax collector and do something more constructive with his life. (False)

How did the Pharisees respond to Jesus’ association with Matthew? What did Jesus say to the Pharisees? What was Jesus trying to help the Pharisees to see?

The Pharisees, of course, were disgusted and offended by Jesus’ association with “sinners” like Matthew. Jesus was trying to help them to see, first of all, how hypocritical this attitude was. As religious leaders, shouldn’t the Pharisees have been concerned about helping the very people who were most in need of help? Second, Jesus was trying to help the Pharisees see that they themselves were desperately in need of help. They too needed a doctor — Jesus, the greatest Physician — but, sadly, they didn’t even realize that they were “sick” and in need of help!

6. When Matthew left his “tollbooth” behind and followed Jesus, his life changed forever in all kinds of ways. Matthew said goodbye to a life of wealth and ease but he also said goodbye to a life of isolation and loneliness. He was now part of a “family” of believers in Christ and followers of Christ. What did the members of this “family” have in common according to verse 17? How does Jesus describe his “family” in Matt. 12:46-50? What is “the will of the Father,” according to John 6:39-40? (See also John 6:29.)

The members of this “family” had two important things in common: Each member was “sick” and sinful and knew it; and each member trusted in Christ for “healing” and forgiveness. According to Matt. 12, Jesus regards as members of His family all those who do the will of His Father. According to John 6, the Father’s will, first and foremost, is that we believe in Jesus as the One whom God has sent to save us from our sin.

Apply the Story to Yourself

1. Martin Luther liked to compare the church to a hospital. How do Jesus’ words in verse 17 support this comparison? Make a list of as many similarities as you can think of between a church and a hospital. How do you fit into this picture? How might this picture of the church as a hospital affect the way we reach out to others who are still outside the church?

If we were to get into the habit of thinking of the church as a hospital for sinners, we might be less likely to view our own church membership as some kind of a status symbol (who would think of bragging about being in the hospital?). We might be less likely to judge or look down on other “sick (sinful) people” around us, who (like us!) desperately need the hope and healing that only the Great Physician can give. We also might be more inclined to encourage others to join us in coming to God’s hospital to find the help that they need. Many people don’t attend church because they feel that they aren’t good enough. Those people need to hear from us the “evangelism line” of Jesus, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:12-13 ESV).

Answers to the following discussion questions are fairly self evident from the Scripture passages listed below. Depending on the time available, leaders may wish to use some or all of these questions, but be sure to leave time for Questions 4 and 5 (the reading of Rom. 12 will take a few minutes, but don’t omit it!).

The family that Matthew joined when he followed Jesus had some very important things in common:

- Each member was a “lost and condemned” sinner.
- Each was “found” and saved by Jesus.
- Each had begun a brand new life and wanted to share the Good News of that new life with others.

But the individual members of this family also were very different from each other.

- Each member had a different background.
- Each had different experiences.
- Each had different gifts and talents to use in service to the Master.

2. Read 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 12-31. According to St. Paul, how and when did we become members of Christ’s family? (See verse 13.)

Does our oneness as a family in Christ mean that we are all supposed to be and act the same?

Why do you think God made us different from each other?

How are we to use our differences?

What is the key to living together in harmony and unity in the church? (Read 1 Cor. 13:1-13.)

3. Do you think there are people in the church who are still lonely, who don’t feel that they really belong or are a part of the family?

Without naming names, try to describe some of the people in your congregation who you think might feel isolated, unloved or unwanted.

Why do you think they feel this way?

What can we do to make these people feel more at home and accepted?

4. Read Rom. 12 verse by verse as a group. Make a list of what you think are the top 10 helpful suggestions contained in this chapter for living together as God’s family in response to His grace in Christ Jesus in ways that please Him and build one another up.

5. Has participation in this servant event helped you grow in your appreciation of what it means to be a part of God’s family? How?

Has this experience provided opportunities for living out some of Paul’s words of encouragement in Rom. 12? How?

Closing

Close by taking turns speaking a two-sentence prayer that begins:

“Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for showing me through this Bible study that ...”

“Help me to live out what I have learned by ...”

Then, sing together “Take My Life, O Lord, Renew” (AGPS 223) or “Father Welcomes” (AGPS 95, LSB 605).

A Visit to Mary and Martha

(See page 14 in the participant study guide.)

Talk Among Yourselves

Perhaps you, like me, are one of those “task-oriented” people who are constantly making to-do lists. If so, you know from experience that just because a job is on the list doesn’t mean it will get done quickly (or at all). (As some wise person once said, “Anyone can do any amount of work provided it isn’t the work he is *supposed* to be doing at that moment.”) Still, to-do lists can help us to remember some of the things that need to be done and help nudge us to come up with some kind of semi-organized plan of attack for getting them done.

Often the hardest part of making those lists is *prioritizing* the various tasks that need to be completed. Which one is the most urgent or important? Which one should be listed second, third, fourth or last? How many times have you made a to-do list and then started with the last or least important item because that one was the easiest to accomplish?

If you had to make a to-do list right now of some of the things you need to accomplish when you return home from this servant event, what items would it include? Which one would you list as your top priority?

Today’s Bible story is about a hardworking, well-intentioned, task-oriented young woman who *thought* she had her priorities straight. But Jesus had other ideas ...

Read the Story for Yourselves

Read the account of Jesus’ visit to the home of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Before moving on to the questions below, take turns completing the following sentence: “In my opinion, the main point of this Bible story is ...”

1. Martha was gracious enough to “open her home” to Jesus (verse 38), who (as verse 38 makes clear) was not alone but was accompanied by His disciples. Assuming that Martha’s offer of hospitality extended also to the disciples, write down some of the things you think might have been on Martha’s to-do list after welcoming these tired, dusty and hungry travelers into her home.

It’s easy to be somewhat sympathetic toward Martha as we read this story and join her in being a little irritated with Mary. After all there was a lot of work to be done and somebody had to do it! Jesus’ re-

sponse to Martha, however, shows that there is more to this story than first meets the eye. Jesus’ words show that He was actually very concerned about Martha and her spiritual (and emotional) health.

2. How do the following words of Martha (see verse 40) give us some “hints” about her unhealthy attitude toward Mary, Jesus and herself?

“Lord, do you not care ...?”

Whenever we start thinking the Lord “doesn’t care” about us and about our needs, something is wrong! Martha had allowed her anxiety about her tasks that “needed” to be done to lead her to question Jesus’ concern for her and even to rebuke Him mildly for His lack of concern.

“my sister has left me ...”

Notice that Martha does not even call Mary by name but refers to her as “my sister” (we can imagine the tone of her voice!). Martha rebukes Jesus mildly and rebukes Mary more pointedly, accusing her of being thoughtless and inconsiderate.

“to serve alone ...”

There is an air of self pity in these words. “Poor me!” She has left me all alone to do all this work by myself!” Self pity is always a sign that something is amiss spiritually.

“Tell her then to help me!”

First, Martha rebukes Jesus for His lack of concern and then she issues a command to the Lord of heaven and earth, “Come one, Jesus, get with it! Tell her to get over here and help me!” When we start bossing Jesus around, we need Jesus to help us re-examine our perspective and our priorities.

3. How does Jesus “diagnose” Martha’s problem in verse 41? What specific words does He use to describe her? How might we describe in today’s language Martha’s personality or state of mind as depicted in this story?

Jesus says that Martha is worried and upset — qualities that do not appear in Paul’s list of the fruit of

the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23. Today we might say that Martha was a perfectionist, workaholic, Type A personality, or that she was stressed out or burned out by the overload of responsibilities that she had taken on herself. Most of us can relate to that state of mind!

4. What did Jesus recommend as a top priority solution for Martha's stress, anger, frustration and anxiety? (See verses 39 and 42.) Was Jesus saying that what Martha was doing was wrong or unimportant? What was He saying? Do you think the work would have still gotten done if Martha had sat down with Mary at Jesus feet? Explain your answer.

What Martha needed, according to Jesus, was not someone to help her attack the items on her to-do list (which would have provided some temporary relief but would not have solved Martha's root problem). What Martha really needed was rest — the kind of rest only Jesus can give. What she was doing was not wrong or unimportant, but she had lost sight of what was most important of all: trusting in Jesus and cultivating her relationship with Him through the calming and consoling instruction of His Word. For Martha, part of trusting Jesus was to trust that the work that was so important to her (more important to her, perhaps, than to those for whom she thought she was doing it!) would get done (or at least what really needed to get done!), even if she took time out, like Mary, to sit at Jesus feet and listen to His wise and comforting counsel.

Apply the Story to Yourselves

1. Based on the sketchy "portrait" of these two women given us in this text, would you say that you have more in common with Mary or with Martha? Why?
2. In your opinion, are the following statements true or false? Share and discuss the answers that emerge from your group.

T or F This story teaches us that it is always more pleasing to God to read your Bible than it is to clean your room or do the dishes.

False! Obviously there is a time and place for both. The issue is one of priorities: keeping our relationship with God central and ordering all of our other activities of service around Him.

T or F According to Jesus, Martha was a worse sinner than Mary.

False! Again, both are important. It will do little good (ultimately) to attend to people's physical needs unless there is also an attempt to meet their spiritual

needs. On the other hand, meeting people's physical needs often presents a wonderful opportunity to share the Gospel with them, and those of us who know the Gospel ought also be concerned (as Jesus was) with providing for people's physical (as well as spiritual) needs.

T or F The greatest need of every person is to receive the spiritual food that Jesus offers through His Word and Sacraments.

True! When all is said and done, this remains, according to Jesus, the "one thing" necessary.

T or F Spending time with Jesus and His Word will help us to worry less, keep our priorities straight, and serve others more willingly and cheerfully.

True! While the Bible gives no automatic or magical guarantee that regular worship and Bible study will make all our problems and stresses disappear, Scripture does promise that the Holy Spirit, working through the Word and Sacraments, will gradually and certainly cultivate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) in our lives.

3. Can our service to others ever become wrong and sinful? If so, when and how can this happen? How can we keep it from happening? (See Heb. 12:2-3.)
Yes, even our service to others can become sinful if we are "serving" for selfish motives or in order to gain praise or recognition for our "good deeds." The key to keep this from happening is to "fix our eyes" on Jesus, who forgives our sinful pride and provides the perfect model for truly selfless and sacrificial service.
4. Discuss the following sentence: "The key to serving others is being served by Jesus." What do the following passages teach us about how Jesus has and still does serve us? See John 13:1-17; John 10:14-18; Luke 22:14-20, 24-27; Heb. 10:25, 4:12, 4:14-16; and 1 John 4:19-21.
The leader may need to be selective in using these passages depending on how much time is available. Be sure to focus here on the very concrete ways that Jesus comes to us today to serve us: through the preached, read or spoken Word; through the Lord's Supper; and through words of forgiveness, encouragement and assurance spoken by the pastor or a fellow Christian, etc.
5. Read what Jesus has to say about worry and anxiety in Matt. 6:25-34. What do you find most meaningful, comforting and encouraging about these words of Jesus?

6. What have you learned this week about priorities? About trusting Jesus to meet your needs? About the importance of staying close to Jesus by listening to His Word and speaking to Him in prayer?

Closing

Ask the person on your right, “What are you worried about these days?” Offer a prayer for him or her, asking Jesus to bring calm and comfort through His Word and Spirit. Then, share a worry of yours with that person, asking him or her to offer a prayer for you. Finally, read Phil. 4:4-7 together as a group.

Close by singing “Seek Ye First” (AGPS 207, LSB 712).

DAY 5 BIBLE STUDY > Luke 10:25-37

The Good Samaritan

(See page 17 in the participant study guide.)

Talk Among Yourselves

We all have our own comfort zones or places where we feel relaxed and at home. These are places where we can be with people who like us just the way we are and who are like us in many ways. There are also, for all of us, places where we are not very comfortable and people with whom (given a choice) we would rather not associate.

Name one of your favorite comfort zones. What makes this place so comfortable for you?

Briefly share an experience that made you feel extremely uncomfortable. Why did you feel that way? How did you deal with the situation? What, if anything, did you learn from the experience?

In today’s Bible story, we will encounter several individuals who were called to venture out of their comfort zones to serve God and their neighbor in a challenging, risky, out-of-the-ordinary way. One of these individuals answered the call with great courage, grace and generosity. As for the others ...

Read the Story for Yourselves

Read the parable of “The Good Samaritan” as told by Jesus in Luke 10:25-37. Although the story may be familiar to you, pay close attention as you read and listen for fresh and new insight or understandings. Name one thing in this story that made a special impression on you as you listened and read this time around.

1. Although this may be a familiar story, it is easy to miss the story’s main point. Why, according to Verse 29, did the expert of the Law ask Jesus the question,

“Who is my neighbor?” What was wrong with this man’s attitude?

According to Verse 29, the Law expert asked Jesus this question because he was “desiring to justify himself.” He was not really interested in deepening or expanding his understanding of what God’s command to “love one’s neighbor” required. Instead, he was hoping to have his own very narrow understanding of this command affirmed by Jesus so that he could continue to trust his own keeping of the Law as the basis for his hope of eternal life.

2. It seems clear from Verses 25-29 that the Law expert was confident that he would “inherit eternal life” because of his love for God and his neighbor. In his mind, however, the word “neighbor” included only those within his own comfort zone — people of his own family, race and religion, people whom he liked and who were like him. What do you think Jesus was trying to show this man through this story? What do you think Jesus was trying to get this man to do? What is the main point of this story?

Out of love for this man, Jesus was trying to show him that his definition of “neighbor” was far too narrow and self-serving and that his pride keeping the Law of love rested on very shaky ground. What Jesus wanted this man to do was repent or see and admit that he had not “loved his neighbor as himself.” He had not kept God’s Law perfectly. Then, Jesus desired the man to trust in Jesus (rather than himself) for salvation.

The main point of this story, therefore, is that we are justified — declared perfect and righteous in God’s sight — not because of our wonderful and loving attitude and actions toward our neighbors (if that were the case, no one would be saved!), but because of God’s wonderful attitude and actions toward us, which He demonstrated by sending His Son to live, die and rise again for us. Jesus said to the man in Verse 28, “do this [keep the Law perfectly], and you will live.” The problem is that none of us can “do this,” which is exactly why Jesus came: to do it for us. We are saved not by “doing” but by trusting in Jesus.

Once we understand Jesus’ main point in telling this story, we also can read this story as a beautiful illustration of how, by God’s grace, we can love and joyfully serve others — even those outside our comfort zone.

3. How did the priest and Levite respond to the challenge and opportunity to help someone in need? Why do you think they responded this way?

The priest not only failed to help this man but apparently went out of his way to avoid helping him (“passed by on the other side of the road”). Priests were required by Jewish law to remain ceremonially pure. If this half-dead (Verse 30) man was actually dead (how could the priest know for sure?) or was to die as the priest tried to help him, the priest would become ceremonially unclean through contact with a dead body (Lev. 21:1ff). Old Testament Law also commands service to one’s neighbor. But the priest was more concerned about remaining clean than about serving a neighbor in need. The Levite, too, as a temple worker, was undoubtedly concerned about ceremonial purity and he too “passed on the other side.” Other reasons could also be given to explain the actions of these two men (concerns about being too busy, fearing the robber was still near, not wanting to get involved or being inconvenienced, etc.). Whatever their reasons, however, their actions stand as a warning to all religious people, including us, who sometimes take pride in looking or acting holy while failing to demonstrate this holiness in their lives through real, sacrificial service to God and others.

4. Make a list of all the things the Samaritan did to care for the robbed and beaten man. Why would Jesus’ listeners be shocked by this story?

The Jews of Jesus’ day despised Samaritans because they were not full-blooded Jews and they worshipped and believed differently from the Jews (see John 4:4-

26). As Jewish religious leaders, priests and Levites normally avoided associating with these hated foreigners at all costs and sometimes even practiced open hostility against them. So for Jesus to hold up a Samaritan as the hero of the story and as the one who truly understood the scope and meaning of God’s Law would be extremely shocking and offensive to the average Jewish listener.

5. Take turns filling in the blanks, “According to this parable, my neighbor is _____, which even includes _____ and _____.”

The idea here is to have participants fill in the first blank with something like “everyone” or “anyone who is in need,” and the second two blanks with words like “my enemy” or “my irritating little brother” or “a stranger” or with the names of specific people who may be difficult to love and serve. If group members do not catch on, the leader can guide them in this direction.

Apply the Story to Yourself

1. After reading the story of the Good Samaritan, how would you react to the following sentence?

“My loving and sacrificial service to my neighbors through this servant event has helped to earn me a place in the kingdom of heaven.”

This statement will most likely be quickly rejected or even “laughed off” as completely wrong and group members will be able to replace it (see Question 2 below) with a statement that highlights God’s love and grace in Christ as the only source of our salvation and speaks of our service to others as a willing and grateful response to God’s love in Christ.

2. How would you revise the sentence above to reflect what Jesus teaches us in this story?
3. Have your experiences this week helped to stretch your comfort zone? If so, how? What new neighbors have you met and served? How have you been served by others? What risks did you take while you were here? What sacrifices did you make to be here? Would you do it again? Would you encourage others to do it?
4. How do we sometimes build barriers between ourselves and those who are different from us in some way or another? How did God deal with the barrier separating us from Him? (See Eph. 2:11-18 and 1

Peter 2:24-25). How do Paul's words in Col. 3:11-14 guide us in our efforts to remove sinful barriers between ourselves and others?

God dealt with the sin barrier separating us from Him by sending Christ to abolish this barrier by taking our sins upon Himself on the Cross. Through Christ we are reconciled to God (regarded by God no longer as His enemies but as His friends). We seek to remove sinful barriers between ourselves and others by treating others as God has treated us in Christ: by forgiving and loving others, especially other fellow Christians — those with whom God has made us one through faith in Christ.

5. How does the story of the Good Samaritan end? How do these words of Jesus apply to your own life back home — to a specific person or situation challenging you to move outside your comfort zone?

Closing

Share with the other members of the group:

1. The *one* most important or memorable thing you learned from this week's Bible study.
2. The *one* most exciting or memorable experience you had this week as you participated in this servant event.
3. The *one* greatest challenge you will face — with God's help — when you return home from this event.

Join hands and allow each member of the group to offer a prayer thanking God for what has been learned this week, the growth that has taken place, and/or special needs and requests for the days and weeks ahead.

Close by singing "Make Me a Servant" (AGPS 174, SSS 20) twice.