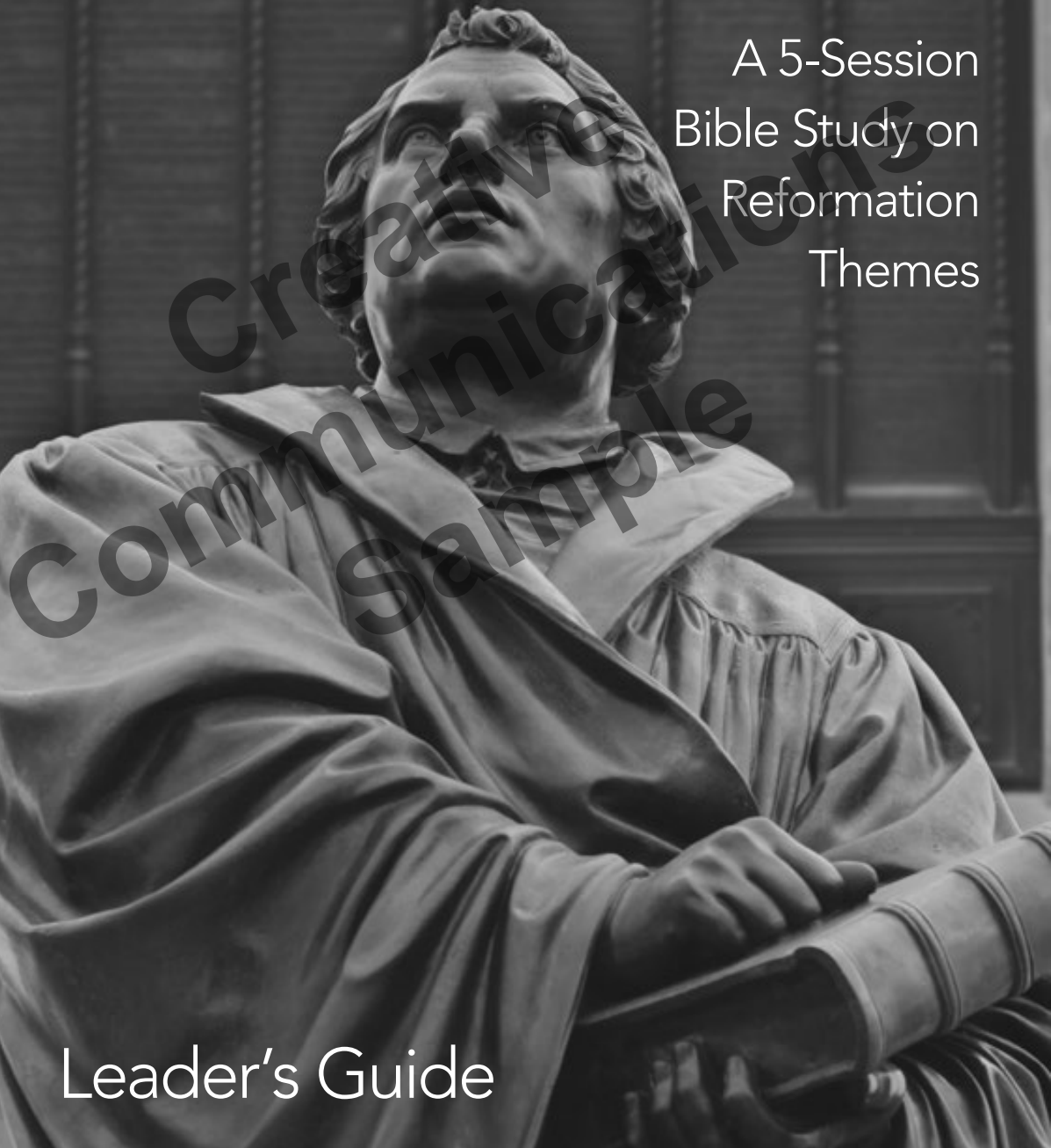

JUSTIFIED!

500 YEARS OF FAITH

A 5-Session
Bible Study on
Reformation
Themes

Leader's Guide



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INTRODUCTION

On October 31, 1517, on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany, Martin Luther posted 95 theses against the sale of indulgences. That challenge to academic debate sparked the events of the Reformation and the restoration of the good news of God's grace and forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

In this Bible study, we will consider the gift of God's saving Word, our lives as his baptized sons and daughters and our callings, or vocations, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and of an earthly kingdom. Finally, we will celebrate the good news that we are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus our Lord. This the Gospel message that still, 500 years later, must be proclaimed to the world.

Creative
Communications
Sample

Leader's Guide For Session 1

BEFORE CLASS: Read through this session yourself. Examine the Bible readings listed and become acquainted with them.

READ: Have someone read the Opening Prayer or read the prayer in unison.

SESSION 1: THE WORD

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John 1:14



OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you spoke through the prophets, providing glimpses of the mystery hidden for ages, the plan of salvation through faith in Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel. When the time was right, you spoke to us through your Son. Increase in us the desire to study your holy Word and to live according to your will. We pray in the name of Jesus our Savior, the Word made flesh. Amen.

DISCUSSION

What is your favorite Bible verse, chapter or story?

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther was all about the Word—the Word of God as found in Holy Scripture and its testimony to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Luther studied the Word and prayed the psalms. He preached the Word from the pulpit and lectured about it in the classroom. He struggled with the grammar and vocabulary of Scripture in his effort to understand it, and he translated the Word into German so that people could read it for themselves. Still, for all his work and study, Luther said that he did not bring about the events of the Reformation. The Word did everything.

THE LIVING AND ACTIVE WORD

1. “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). **Read Genesis 1:1-5 and Psalm 33:6-9.** How is the power of the Word evident in these verses?
2. **Read Isaiah 55: 8-11.** Here again we see the power of the Word of God. How is the Word like snow or rain? How did Jesus, the Word made flesh, fulfill the promise of these verses?
3. **Read 1 Peter 1:22-25 and James 1:21.** What is said about the Word’s creating power in these verses? What particular “word” from God is the apostle describing? When did that creating Word first come to you?

THE WORD MADE FLESH

1. **Read John 1:1-5.** What similarities do you find between these verses and Genesis 1:1-5? What does John, the apostle and evangelist, tell us about creation and about the eternal existence of Jesus, the Word? **Read John 1:14-18 and Hebrews 1:1-4.** How does the writer to the Hebrews describe Jesus as God? What is the relationship of Jesus, the Word made flesh, to all of creation?

DISCUSS: Discuss favorite chapters or verses of the Bible.

READ: Read aloud or have someone read aloud the Introduction.

The Living And Active Word

1. **Genesis 1:1-5 and Psalm 33:6-9.**
When God speaks, things come into existence. He says, “Let there be light,” and light appears. By his Word the heavens and “all their host” were made. “He spoke and it came to be.”
2. **Isaiah 55:8-11.** God’s Word accomplishes the purpose for which he sends it, just as snow and rain fall to water to the earth and cause crops to grow, providing seed and bread. Jesus, the Word, accomplished all that the Father sent him to do (see also Philippians 2:8; John 17:4).
3. **1 Peter 1:22-25 and James 1:21.**
We have been born again through “the living and abiding word of God,” which was the good news, the Gospel, proclaimed to us. The implanted word saves our souls. Answers will vary.

The Word Made Flesh

1. **John 1:1-5.** Both passages begin with the words, “In the beginning.” Both speak of the light that God brings into the darkness. Jesus, the Word, was in the beginning with God and he was—and is—God. Everything was made through him. **John 1:14-18 and Hebrews 1:1-4.** God spoke to us through his Son. Jesus is the exact imprint of the nature of God; he is the radiance of God’s glory. Jesus upholds the universe by his word of power (see also Colossians 1:17).

2. **John 5:30-36.** The works that Jesus is doing, the works the Father gave him to do, bear witness to his identity, to the fact that the Father sent him. **John 5:37-47.** The Father bore witness to Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:17) and at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), saying, “This is my beloved Son.” The Jews searched the Scriptures for the way to eternal life. They could not find eternal life because they did not see Jesus in the Scriptures. Only Jesus can give forgiveness and life. They preferred the glory that comes from people rather than the glory that comes from God. Moses would accuse them for their unbelief because Moses wrote about the coming Messiah (see Genesis 3:15; Deuteronomy 18:15). Answers will vary, but some people read the Bible just as a book of rules, a guide for godly living. Even when they read about Jesus, they may see him as merely a wise teacher or a good example to follow in life. They deny that Jesus is the Son of God.
3. **Matthew 17:1-8.** The Father says, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” Answers will vary, but we study Scripture correctly when we see its testimony to Jesus our Savior.

The Word Proclaimed

1. **Luke 24:44-49.** Answers will vary, but prophecies might include references to Jesus virgin birth (Isaiah 7), his crucifixion (Psalm 22) and his resurrection (Hosea 6). The disciples were to proclaim the message of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus’ name. Their testimony was credible because they were eyewitnesses to the risen Lord. **Matthew 28:16-20.** Answers will vary, but in Matthew Jesus sends the disciples to baptize in the name of the Triune God and to teach. In Luke he speaks of the message of repentance and forgiveness. In both the disciples are sent into all the world.
2. **1 Corinthians 1:18-31.** Answers will vary, but perhaps unbelievers can’t imagine that salvation could come through a man crucified by the Romans 2000 years ago. God was revealed in weakness as the baby in the manger in Bethlehem and as the crucified victim on the cross, yet this is the way he chose to save us. Answers will vary, but Christ is everything for us—our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. There is nothing about which we can boast! We did nothing to save ourselves. **1 Corinthians 2:1-5.** Paul came among the Corinthians “in weakness and in fear and much trembling.” His speech and message were not stated in profound ways with words of wisdom. The faith of Paul’s hearers rested not on his speaking ability but on the power of God the Holy Spirit. Answers will vary.

2. **Read John 5:30-36.** Jesus came to accomplish the will of Father. For a while, John the Baptist bore witness to Jesus’ identity. What else bears witness to Jesus, identifying him as the Father’s Son (see also Acts 2:22)? **Read John 5:37-47.** To what might Jesus be referring when he says that the Father bore witness to him? What did the Jews hope to find as they searched the Scriptures? Why were they not able to find what they sought? What glory did they prefer to the glory that comes from God? Why would Moses accuse them? In what circumstances today do people “search the Scriptures” without seeing the Word’s testimony to Jesus?
3. **Read Matthew 17:1-8.** When Jesus was transfigured, Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, appeared to speak with him about his departure, or exodus, soon to be accomplished in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31). What does the Father say to testify to his Son? When the frightened disciples finally looked up, “they saw no one but Jesus only.” Why might those words be good advice for us as we study Holy Scripture?

THE WORD PROCLAIMED

1. **Read Luke 24:44-49.** Jesus accomplished everything that had been written about him in the Scriptures. Name a few of the many prophecies written about Jesus in “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” What particular message about Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, was to be proclaimed by the disciples? Why was their testimony especially credible? **Read Matthew 28:16-20.** How does Jesus’ description of the proclamation similar to and different from his words in Luke’s gospel?
2. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.** The word of the cross is the good news that Jesus Christ was crucified and raised for our salvation. Why would the lost—those “who are perishing”—think of the word of the cross as “folly,” or foolishness? In what ways did God reveal himself in Christ with a weakness that was “stronger than men”? Why don’t we

have any reason to boast? **Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.** How does the apostle Paul describe his skill in public speaking? (Paul's opponents agreed with him; see 2 Corinthians 10:10.) Why did Paul consider even this weakness to be a strength? What was Paul's central message? Is that still the central message in our churches today? Why or why not?

3. **Read Acts 1:15-26.** It was necessary to replace Judas, who had betrayed Jesus and then taken his own life. What particular experience or requirement was necessary for the man who would be selected to become an apostle? Along with the message of Christ crucified, what was also central to the apostolic proclamation? (see also Acts 4:2; Acts 5:30; Acts 10:39-40; Acts 17:30-32)
4. **Read 2 Timothy 1:8-14.** What has happened to Paul because of his ministry as "a preacher and apostle"? Why might Timothy be ashamed of the gospel testimony, or of Paul? What counsel does Paul give to Timothy concerning the proclamation of the Word? How do we still follow Paul's counsel today in our proclamation of the good news?
Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2. What was Timothy to do with the message he learned from Paul? How do we do the same today?
Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. What does it mean to be ready to preach the Word "in season and out of season"? What is Paul's warning concerning Timothy's audience? How have you seen that warning fulfilled in our culture today?

THE WRITTEN WORD

1. "All Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit inspired the authors of Scripture to write the words of God in human language, with its vocabulary and rules of grammar. **Read Romans 1:16-17.** Martin Luther struggled with the words "the righteousness of God." He knew that the righteous God punished unrighteous sinners. Then, through his study of the words, Luther came to see that God's righteousness is a gift. How is that gift received?

3. **Acts 1:15-26.** The man selected as an apostle had to have been with the other disciples from the time of Jesus' baptism until his ascension. The new apostle would also be a witness to Jesus' resurrection. The message of Jesus' resurrection was central to the apostle's proclamation.

4. **2 Timothy 1:8-14.** Paul was persecuted and imprisoned because of his testimony to Jesus Christ. Timothy might be tempted to be ashamed of Paul as a prisoner or be worried about the suffering that came to those who followed Jesus. Timothy was to follow "the pattern of sound words" he learned from Paul and guard that carefully. We follow that pattern of sound words today as we take our teaching only from Holy Scripture and the inspired apostolic message found in the Word. **2 Timothy 2:1-2.** Timothy was to entrust the message of salvation to faithful men who would teach others. Answers will vary, but today we train our pastors and teachers to study the Scriptures and faithfully teach the truth. **2 Timothy 4:1-5.** Timothy should preach the Word all the time. People may not want to hear the Word and may find teachers they like better, who teach what they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear—the message of repentance and forgiveness through Christ Jesus. Answers will vary.

The Written Word

1. **Romans 1:16-17.** The righteousness of God is received through faith in Jesus Christ.

2. **John 20:30-31.** John wrote his Gospel account so that people could believe that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah) and the Son of God, and that by believing they would have life in his name.
3. **Luke 1:1-4.** The apostles were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word who delivered to others the things that Jesus had said and done. Luke compiled his account to that Theophilus would be certain about the things he had been taught. (Note: Theophilus' identity is unknown; since he is addressed as "most excellent," he may have been a wealthy individual or an important official.) Answers will vary.
4. **Psalm 1.** Answers will vary. As we study the Word our faith grows and thrives.
5. **Acts 2: 42-47.** The believers listened to the teaching of the apostles and celebrated Holy Communion together. They met together for fellowship and prayer. They held goods in common and cared for the needs of others. They went to the temple and were regarded with favor by others. The Lord added daily to the number of those who were saved. Answers will vary.

READ: Read responsively the words of the Bible verses.

2. **Read John 20:30-31.** Jesus had said that the written Scriptures of the Old Testament bore witness to him (John 5:39, 46). What was the purpose of John's New Testament account?
3. **Read Luke 1:1-4.** Luke was not one of the twelve disciples, but he was a believer who was a doctor (Colossians 4:14) and a traveling companion of the apostle Paul. In the introduction to his Gospel, what does Luke say about the apostles who had first proclaimed the Word to Luke and the other believers? What was Luke's purpose in compiling his "orderly account"? Why is that purpose useful for us today?
4. **Read Psalm 1.** Why would "day and night" meditation on the "law of the LORD" help us to grow and thrive in our faith? Why is the image of a thriving tree a helpful image for our study of God's Word?
5. **Read Acts 2:42-47.** In what different ways did the early believers gather around the Word? How did they express their trust in Jesus, the Word made flesh, in their words and actions? How was the Lord active among them? How is your life in Christ similar today? How is it different?

Responsive Reading..... Psalm 119:101-105

I hold back my feet from every evil way,

In order to keep your word.

I do not turn aside from your rules,

For you have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste,

Sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Through your precepts I get understanding;

Therefore I hate every false way.

Your word is a lamp to my feet

And a light to my path.

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