

LEADER GUIDE



A. Trevor Sutton

BEING LUTHERAN

Living in the Faith
You Have Received

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Chapter 1

1. What is the appeal to open source?

Free access is the most obvious appeal to open source. Who doesn't like free stuff? The lack of an entry fee provides widespread opportunities for collaboration. Instead of limiting access to corporations or wealthy individuals, open source gives diverse people a seat at the table.

2. How have you witnessed sin close you off to other people in your own life? Read Acts 28:17–31.

Daily life is teeming with the closure of sin. Relationships are closed by anger, hate, and distrust. Communities are closed by racial tension, economic disparity, and busy schedules. The reading from Acts shows how Paul faced the closure of sin in religious opposition and civil imprisonment.

3. Jesus opens our relationship to God. How has Jesus opened your eyes, ears, heart, mind, and hands to God?

Jesus opens our eyes to see hurting people without the Gospel, vulnerable people in need of protection, and neighbors desiring friendship. Jesus opens our ears to hear the cry of widows and orphans, the faith of young children, and the promise of the Gospel. Jesus transforms hearts, minds, and hands. He gives you a new heart of faith, opens your mind to divine truth, and uses your hands to work for your neighbors.

4. This chapter looks at Saul, Lydia, and Peter. Are there other individuals in Scripture who were opened up to God by Jesus Christ? Read Acts 8:9–25 for one example.

Simon the Magician was opened up to God by Jesus Christ. Others include Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25–40), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40).

5. Luther fought to make worship and Scripture accessible to all people. What are some ways that these gifts are neglected today? How might we reverse this practice?

People allow many things to crowd their Sunday morning worship. Soccer games, yard work, and sleep are viewed as more important than worship. Scripture is disregarded as arcane, obsolete, or boring. These practices can be reversed through teaching. Knowing the work of God in worship and learning how Scripture is the Word of God makes these a priority in daily life.

6. Since the Reformation, open access to the Gospel has been threatened. What are some ways that open access to the Gospel is threatened today? Are these new threats or ancient threats? Read 1 Peter 5:8–9.

Open access to the Gospel is threatened in many ways. People deride Christianity as an unintelligent, backwards, even oppressive movement. Our culture tries to close the door to faith by making it subservient to scientific knowledge. The Gospel is closed when people overbook their schedules and overlook Jesus. Behind all of these threats to the open Gospel is the old ancient foe described in 1 Peter 5:8–9.

7. The Good News of Jesus Christ is the only open source of salvation for all people. How does your congregation share the Gospel? How do you personally share the Gospel?

Worship is an obvious way that congregations share the Gospel. However, there are many other ways: Bible study, private confession, mission trips, and evangelism efforts. Personally sharing the Gospel is certainly not disconnected from these efforts; however, you have a different sphere of influence than your congregation. You have a personal relationship with your neighbors in a way that the congregation cannot. Share the Gospel as a congregation and as an individual.

8. The vignette about Seliman discusses how open access to the Gospel is closed throughout many parts of the world. Can persecution benefit the proclamation of the Gospel? How do you see God at work through persecution? Read Daniel 3:8-30 and Acts 12:6-19.

The Early Church thrived during intense persecution. And long before the Church in Acts, God's power was made manifest through the men in the fiery furnace. Persecution cannot stop the Gospel. God is powerful to take the hardship of His people and turn it into a mighty witness for all.

9. How might you more openly live out your faith in Jesus Christ? What part of your daily life needs to be opened by the Holy Spirit?

The distance between Sunday and Monday can be massive. Many people have a difficult time connecting their life of faith with Monday morning. God promises to fill you with the fullness of God through prayer (Ephesians 3:14-21). Praying for spiritual strength to openly live out your faith is the best place to start. The Holy Spirit will open what has been closed by sin.

Chapter 2

1. Nothing impresses us anymore. Agree or disagree?

Perhaps it is still possible for us to be impressed. However, it is increasingly difficult. What was deemed impressive by previous generations is now brushed aside as boring. Digital technology has afforded us a wealth of new information and media, yet it has robbed us of our ability to be impressed by ordinary occurrences.

2. Jesus challenged apathy long before His birth. Where do you see the promise of Jesus challenging apathy in the Old Testament? What were the prophets trying to do through their prophetic words? Read Isaiah 53.

These words of Isaiah challenge apathy with their vivid depiction of sacrificial love. The prospect of someone suffering in the place of others is enough to shake people out of their malaise. The prophets in the Old Testament were speaking on behalf of God as they pointed God's people to Jesus.

3. Read Luke 9:23 and verses 57–62. What is the difference between these two invitations from Jesus? Why does it matter that one invitation is given to the crowd while the other is given to a specific person?

In Luke 9:23, Jesus is addressing a group of His followers when He teaches them that a disciple is called to take up his cross and follow Jesus daily, that is, to submit oneself in humility to the Kingdom that now comes in preaching

(and in His day, the miracles) and open oneself to the contempt of the world. In Luke 9:57–62, we get another stark example of the radical nature of the call to discipleship. To take up the cross daily is to proclaim the kingdom of God. But Jesus’ word of encouragement in 9:60 is directed to a specific believer worried about burying his father. Jesus extends the invitation “to all” believers in Luke 9:23, but He was speaking to specific individuals in verses 57–62, and this should not be broadly applied to all people. It is important to note such distinctions when applying the words of Jesus to your own life.

4. Read Romans 3:21–26. According to these verses, who performs the work of salvation? What comfort comes from knowing that God alone is the source of salvation?

These verses make it clear that all are justified by God’s grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. There is comfort in this because salvation does not depend on our own efforts or work.

5. Passive righteousness deals with our standing before God. Active righteousness deals with our standing before others. Why is it so important to rightly distinguish these two kinds of righteousness?

Confusing the two kinds of righteousness is very easy. And it is very problematic. Actively trying to earn righteousness before God will only leave you disappointed. Likewise, it is wrong to passively hope that God’s grace will perform your daily tasks, pay your taxes, and tuck your kids in at night. It is vitally important to distinguish passive

and active righteousness in order to rightly understand the free gift of divine grace and the earthly responsibility of daily life.

6. Luther read the Bible cover-to-cover twice a year. Why would someone so familiar with the Bible reread it each year? What is your practice of daily Bible reading?

Luther continued to read the Bible twice a year because he felt God's Word had something more to say to him. Simply because he had read it all the way through was not a reason to put the Bible on the shelf. Developing a practice of daily Bible reading will fill your mind and your heart with the Word of God.

7. Read Acts 17:10–12. Like the believers in Berea, Lutherans carefully examine the Scriptures. What more do you need to learn in order to better defend your faith in Jesus Christ?

Lutherans are not the first to take Scripture seriously. Many generations of God's people have carefully examined the Scriptures. Knowing the Bible allows you to defend your faith. Perhaps you need to learn more about the formation of the biblical canon, the problems with evolutionary theory, or how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament.

8. Jesus invites you to die to yourself and be made alive in Him. What part of you has died as a result of following Jesus? What part of you has new life as a result of following Jesus? Read Romans 6:4.

Jesus puts death to death. He puts sin—slander, hate, greed, lust—on the cross. Following Jesus will cause these parts of you to die. Likewise, following Jesus brings new life and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). New life in Jesus means that you will have new love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer chose to die living out his faith rather than to live with a lukewarm faith. What role did prayer and Bible reading play in his daily life? How might these spiritual disciplines have compelled him to return to Germany and defend innocent lives?

Bonhoeffer pushed against the practices of most theologians in his day. Rather than bending to the common practice, he practiced his own habit of prayer and Bible reading. Bonhoeffer was shaped by his practice of prayer and Bible reading in such a profound way that he was compelled to return to Germany.

Chapter 3

1. Relativism claims that truth is confined to a specific cultural or historical context. How might relativism benefit Christianity? How might relativism hinder Christianity?

A benefit of relativism is that it puts all truth claims on a level field; relativism believes that all truth claims should be respected, even if not all truth claims should be accepted. This allows Christians to speak up and share their beliefs with others. The obvious problem with relativism, however, is that it denies the existence of a durable or transcendent truth. This is clearly contrary to the teaching of Jesus.

2. Read Matthew 21:23–27. Why did Jesus refuse to tell the chief priests and elders the source of His authority?

Jesus refused to tell them something they had already heard and denied. Jesus made it clear throughout His ministry that He was sent by God the Father. The chief priests and elders had already made it clear that they would never believe this to be true.

3. Read Luke 9:1–6. Jesus gave His authority to the disciples. Why were they told to not bring anything (no staff, bag, bread, or money) for the journey? What was Jesus trying to teach the disciples by sending them out with nothing more than His authority?

Going out empty-handed forced the disciples to rely on the authority of Jesus. Had they taken money with them,

the disciples might have thought their efforts were successful due to the power of money. Taking nothing with them made it so there was no confusion about the source of their success.

4. Augustine moved from confusion to confession by the work of the Holy Spirit. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. What is the wisdom of this age in 1 Corinthians 2:6? What is the wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians 2:7? Are these different types of wisdom in opposition to one another?

The wisdom of this age referenced in 1 Corinthians 2:6 is human reason. This is what people deem right and wrong, good and bad, wise and foolish. On the other hand, the wisdom of God is what God deems right and wrong, good and bad, wise and foolish. These different types of wisdoms are very often in opposition to one another.

5. Luther did more than simply give his barber a quick answer. Why did Luther encourage him to develop his own articulation of prayer? What is the benefit of using the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed as a guide for prayer?

Luther's encouragement for his barber to develop his own articulation of prayer shows the deeply personal nature of prayer. Even if you are praying with others, prayer is still a personal and intimate moment with God. The benefit of using the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed as a guide is that your praying is anchored in long-standing confessions of God's people. Rather than simply going your

own way, these guides allow you to pray in a God-established way.

6. Read Matthew 22:23–33. Theological bloodletting is nothing new; Jesus confronted the Sadducees regarding their skepticism of the resurrection. What did Jesus use to correct their confusion? Why was the crowd astonished at His teaching?

Jesus used Scripture to correct their confusion. He pointed them to the Word of God to show them that they had let the blood from their brains. The crowd was astonished at His teaching because He was willing to confront the wisdom of the age with the wisdom of God.

7. Read Matthew 19:1–9. Why is it important to recognize that Jesus treated the Old Testament as historically and theologically reliable? What does that reveal about how Jesus viewed Scripture?

Jesus trusted Scripture and taught that Adam and Eve were real people. Recognizing how Jesus treated the Old Testament as historically and theologically reliable should encourage us to do the same. He viewed Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. We follow Jesus when we believe the same.

8. What does it mean to intellectually grapple with the Gospel? Does embracing Jesus with your brain replace embracing Jesus with your heart?

God has given you a brain. Use it to learn and understand what God has done for you in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul did this when he reasoned and persuaded people about the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). To be certain, embracing Jesus with your brain does not replace trusting and believing Jesus with your heart; Satan knows a lot about Jesus, yet he does not believe Jesus is Lord.

9. Reread the vignette. Do you know anyone like María? Read 1 Corinthians 3:18–23. What does Paul mean when he tells his readers to become a fool in order to become wise?

The kingdom of God turns human thinking upside down. María had her thinking turned upside down by Jesus; she went from priding herself on disproving the existence of God to knowing nothing but Christ crucified. Paul encourages readers to trust in God's ways (divine wisdom) as opposed to our own ways (worldly wisdom). This might come at the cost of appearing foolish to others.

Chapter 4

1. Read Genesis 2:1–3. God worked in order to make His creation. What do the six days of creation reveal about God’s nature? Is work part of God’s plan for creation or a result of sin?

A desire to work is clearly a part of God’s nature. God spent six days actively working on His creation. And it is important to note that this work was done before sin entered into creation. Work was part of God’s plan before sin. However, sin has distorted and destroyed fruitful work.

2. Jesus Christ is proof that God loves work. What work did Jesus do before the cross? What work did Jesus do after the resurrection? Read John 4:31–38.

The work that Jesus did before the cross and after the resurrection is the same: Jesus does the work of God the Father. He works to accomplish the will of God. He works to do the work of God. Jesus worked hard at these tasks.

3. The wedding in Cana shows Jesus doing the work of vintner, vintner, and sommelier immediately. What are some other miracles in which Jesus performs human work immediately? Read John 6:5–14.

Jesus feeding the five thousand with bread and fish is another example of Jesus performing human work immediately. He performed the work of baker and fisherman instantaneously. What would have taken others hours of work, Jesus accomplished in seconds. His is fruitful labor indeed.

4. Read Luke 10:25–37. For what purpose did Jesus tell the parable of the Good Samaritan? Is this parable an encouragement to work for others or a glimpse into God’s work for us? Could it be both?

The parable of the Good Samaritan is often used as an encouragement for people to be better neighbors. However, seeing the love and work of Jesus is the primary purpose of this parable. Jesus binds our wounds, takes care of us, and pays our price for healing. He is the Good Samaritan, and we are the wounded traveler. As imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1), we are sent out to do the same mercy work.

5. Read Matthew 5:17–20. What does it mean that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it? What is the role of God’s Law now that Jesus has fulfilled it through His life, death, and resurrection?

Although the distinction is subtle, Jesus came to fulfill the Law rather than abolish it. This means that Jesus has upheld the Law rather than reject it. He lived it in a way that we could not. The role of God’s Law is now to point us to Jesus. Rather than being a path to earning salvation, the Law shows our sin and need for a Savior.

6. Antinomianism means rejecting the role of God’s Law in the Christian life. Are Lutherans antinomians? If not, what is the role of the Law in the life of a Christ follower?

Lutherans are far from antinomians. We believe that the Law should curb, mirror, and guide our lives. The Law

curbs our sinful impulses, reveals our brokenness and need for a Savior, and guides our daily decisions.

7. Sanctification is the lifelong process of becoming holy. Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. Who is the primary actor in sanctification? Does the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification look the same for everybody?

The Holy Spirit drives the work of sanctification. This is not a human work; it is the work of God in and through us. Although the same Holy Spirit performs the work of sanctification, the sanctified life looks different for each person. God takes the unique gifts and blessings He has given us and draws them out in sanctification.

8. Read Matthew 7:15-20. In Christ, the work that you do is holy work. Does it always appear that way? Is the work of a Christian fundamentally different than the work of an unbeliever?

Our work often looks ordinary and boring. Even though our work is holy work, this may not be evident to those around us. The work of a Christian is fundamentally different than the work of an unbeliever; good trees bear good fruit. Jesus has made us good trees capable of bearing good fruit. This may look like ordinary work, yet it is holy work.

9. Dr. Bessie led an incredibly productive and compassionate life. How did her relationship with Jesus shape her daily work for others? How does your relationship with Jesus shape your daily work for others?

Dr. Bessie trusted that her relationship with God was complete in Christ Jesus. She did not have to work for God's love because Jesus had already performed that work on her behalf. Therefore, Dr. Bessie was driven by a strong desire to work for the needs of others.

Chapter 5

1. Read Matthew 5:1-12. How does Jesus recolor conventional thinking through this teaching? Why might other religious teachers resist this colorful teaching of Jesus?

Jesus recolors conventional thinking by lifting up those who are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry, and thirsty. He upholds the merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and persecuted. Other religious teachers would resist this teaching because they would have to reflect it in their own lives. Jesus actually did reflect these teachings in His own life.

2. Read Matthew 17:1-13. What is the meaning behind Jesus becoming radiantly white? Why did Peter, James, and John respond with terror when they saw Jesus transfigured?

This occurrence, known as the transfiguration, was a preview of Christ's coming glory. It was a glimpse at the true color of the resurrected Jesus. Witnessing this massive display of God's glory apparently made Peter, James, and John feel completely overwhelmed and overpowered by the Son of God; witnessing the transfiguration of Jesus exposed His glory and their frailties.

3. Jesus engaged a whole array of colorful people with the mercy of God. Did Jesus discriminate against certain ethnicities? Was racism an issue during that time in history? Read Matthew 15:21–28.

Jesus displayed an incredible openness to other ethnicities. Racism was, as it still is today, a serious issue during the time of Jesus. Although Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman may seem harsh, it is actually a display of His openness to other ethnicities. A Jewish man conversing with a Canaanite woman was scandalous during the time of Jesus. The Jewish people went out of their way to avoid contact with Canaanite people. Nevertheless, Jesus extended the healing power of divine mercy to this woman of a different ethnicity. Although Jesus came to be Israel's Messiah, He gave His life for all people of all races.

4. Christians carry Christ with them wherever they go. How does this change your perspective on daily life? Are menial tasks made holy because of Christ's presence?

The presence of Jesus changes everything. Words of forgiveness have the power of Christ. Acts of service build the kingdom of God. Your presence carries the peace of Christ. Even menial tasks—changing diapers, going to work, befriending someone on the bus—are holy with the presence of Christ.

5. Luther taught that Christians are “Christ’s one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us” (LW 31:367). What does this look like in your life? How do you bring Christ’s love, forgiveness, and peace to the people around you?

We often think that being Christ’s one to another means doing ministry activities. We assume that we are only bringing Christ’s love when we volunteer at church or do religious things. This is not the case. Being a good neighbor, raising children, loving your spouse, paying your taxes, and mowing your lawn are all ways that you can bring Christ’s love to the people around you.

6. Read Matthew 10:16–18. Jesus prepared His disciples to stand out from the crowd. How does your faith in Jesus lead you to stand out from the crowd? What are some ways that you blend in with the crowd? Is this necessarily a bad thing?

It is not a bad thing to blend in with the crowd. That is assuming that the crowd is following Jesus. The Church is becoming increasingly distinct from the culture. As God’s people, we are called to reflect Him first and foremost. This will cause us to stand in contrast with the world around us.

7. Luther faced public ridicule for opposing the culture of his day. Have you ever faced public ridicule for your faith in Jesus? How can you face persecution in a godly way? Read Matthew 10:19–25.

In some countries, public ridicule is nothing compared to the persecution of Christians. In other countries, mild discomfort is all that Christians receive by way of public ridicule. You can face persecution in a godly way by trusting in God even in the midst of hardship.

8. How is cultural disobedience different than civil disobedience? Read 1 Peter 2:13–17.

Cultural disobedience is resisting the accepted way of the culture. Civil disobedience is resisting the rules and laws of the land. Christians are called to follow and uphold the rule of government. We are not, however, called to follow the ways of the culture.

9. Jack vividly reflects the color of Jesus. How much do your actions, lifestyle, or practices reflect the color of the culture?

This is a personal question. It is very easy to reflect the color of the culture. Our likes, dislikes, fears, hopes, and loves are heavily shaped by the culture in which we live. Explore what barriers are keeping you from reflecting the color of Jesus.

Chapter 6

1. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. There is nothing of lasting worth without the hope of God in Christ Jesus. What is the difference between hope and optimism?

Hope is always based in reality. Gardeners have reason to hope that a seed will turn into a plant because the reality of seeds is that they turn into plants; within a seed is the material needed for a plant. Optimism is simply anticipating good fortune. Christian hope is based in the reality that Jesus is victorious over death. Within Jesus is all the righteousness, holiness, and perfection needed for eternal life. Gardeners have reason to hope in seeds because all that is needed for a plant to grow is contained in a seed; Christians have reason to hope in Jesus because all that is needed for eternal life is found in Him.

2. Many people have ended up in error trying to make sense of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Read 1 Timothy 3:16. What do many people erroneously believe about the incarnation? Is this erroneous belief intentional or accidental?

The incarnation is among the most profoundly mysterious occurrences in all creation. It is not at all surprising that this topic would be so prone to error and confusion. Many have accidentally fallen into error trying to confess the mystery of God in human flesh. Some have believed that Jesus only appeared to be human (Docetism). Others have believed that Jesus was only human and not truly divine (Arianism). These erroneous beliefs usually occur when somebody overemphasizes one truth at the expense of

other truths (e.g., overemphasizing the humanity of Jesus at the expense of His divinity).

3. All of creation rejoiced at the coming of Jesus. Did all of creation come under the curse of sin? What happened to the ground and animals as a result of human sin? Read Genesis 3:17-21.

All creation was brought into ruin by the sin of Adam and Eve. The ground produced thorns and thistles. Animals were killed to make clothing for humans. Human sin was powerful enough to take all of creation down with it. But new life in Christ Jesus was powerful enough to repair all of creation.

4. Scripture is teeming with examples of new life coming to individuals through faith in Jesus. Besides those mentioned in the chapter, are there other individuals in Scripture who have been made new through faith in Christ? Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

The apostle Paul was made new through faith in Christ. He makes it clear that before new life in Christ, he had no good in him: “though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent” (1 Timothy 1:13). Jesus destroys the death of sin and brings new life.

5. Read Ephesians 2:8–9. What is grace? What does it mean to be saved? Why are accurate definitions for these words so important?

Grace is undeserved goodwill and favor shown by God to sinners. To be saved is to receive God’s salvation from condemnation. It is very important to have accurate definitions for these words because many of our beliefs are built upon these words. These words can be distorted in many ways and result in confused beliefs.

6. Why might Luther teach that if the article concerning justification falls, then everything falls? Why is salvation by grace through faith such a vital confession for Lutherans?

Misunderstanding justification jeopardizes all other Christian beliefs. If justification is confused, then the person of Jesus is confused. If justification is misunderstood, then salvation is misunderstood. If justification is lost, then grace is lost. This confession—salvation by grace through faith in Christ—is the solid ground upon which Lutheran theology is built.

7. Even your own salvation is to the glory of God. How is your salvation to God's glory? What are some ways that people diminish God's glory in salvation? Read 1 Corinthians 10:31–33.

Your salvation is to God's glory because it is God's gift to you. Salvation is earned not by our works but by Christ Jesus. People try to diminish God's glory in salvation by turning it into a work that is accomplished by us.

8. Brokenness abounds. What sort of brokenness abounds around you? How does new life in Christ change this brokenness? Read Isaiah 25:6–9.

Look around, and you will see divorce, disease, racism, violence, greed, corruption, depression, and scads of sin's shrapnel. New life in Christ swallows up this brokenness forever and replaces it with the newness of Jesus.

9. Ben received new life from Christ Jesus. Do you know anyone like Ben? Is new life in Christ always a dramatic conversion?

New life in Christ is not always a dramatic conversion like what happened to Ben. Many people receive new life in Christ at Baptism. The conversion of an infant through the waters of Baptism is just as legitimate and profound as the conversion of a wayward adult.

Chapter 7

1. God created man out of a clump of dirt. How was the creation of humans different than the rest of creation? How did God utilize ordinary material in the creation of woman? Read Genesis 1:24-25 and 2:7, 21-22.

Rather than speaking man into being as He did with the rest of creation, God formed man out of a clump of dirt. In the same way, God used bone to form woman. Instead of keeping His distance, God used the ordinary material of creation to make His human creatures.

2. Read John 9:1-7. What are some other ways that Jesus could have performed this miracle? Why do you think He performed it the way He did?

Jesus could have simply spoken a word and healed this man. Jesus could have also written the man a prescription for expensive ointment from an apothecary. Instead, Jesus used simple mud and water to heal this man's blindness. These ordinary materials let the extraordinary power of Jesus shine through even brighter.

3. Read Mark 6:30–44. What are some other ways that Jesus used the ordinary to perform the extraordinary?

Jesus used the material that was on hand—five loaves and two fish—to perform this miracle. This miracle drew from the ordinary material that was already present in the community in order to work an extraordinary miracle. Like the healing of the blind man with mud, the ordinary material used for the miracle magnifies the power of Jesus.

4. The Crusades were a hunt for extravagant and expensive, glitzy and glamorous objects. Crusaders were seeking a once-in-a-lifetime experience that would solidify their salvation. How do Christians today chase after these sorts of once-in-a-lifetime experiences?

Many people try to buy experiences rather than stuff. Nevertheless, experiences can be just as expensive, glitzy, and glamorous as material objects. Chasing after memorable experiences in order to solidify salvation can take the shape of mission trips, tours of the Holy Land, or spiritual pilgrimages. Trusting in these experiences to solidify your salvation is dangerous. Believers must be cautious to not trust in anything or anyone other than Jesus. Trusting that a trip overseas will rejuvenate your faith is just as dangerous as trusting in a relic to deliver salvation.

5. Read Philippians 3:17-21. Luther found no peace in relics. Where do people look for peace today? How are these modern objects of comfort different than religious relics? How are they similar?

Many people today try to find peace in traveling, technology, binge-watching television, social media, and a whole slew of other objects. These are unlike relics in that they are not explicitly religious items. However, they are similar to relics in that anything we fear, love, or trust in is an idol.

6. Lutherans believe that it does not belong to human authority to promise grace. What does this say about the Lutheran understanding of Sacraments? What do they deliver?

Lutherans believe that Sacraments are divinely instituted with the promise of grace. Central to the Sacraments is the certain promise and delivery of God's grace.

7. Jesus gave the Church the authority to forgive sins. Are there other places in Scripture in which God has given His people great responsibility? Read Genesis 1:28 and 2:15.

God has given His creatures the great responsibility of dominion and guardianship over creation. Just as being caretaker over creation is a significant responsibility, so is the forgiveness of sins.

8. Baptism is never distant in the life of the believer. How does your Baptism impact your daily life? What can you do to remember the present impact of your Baptism? Read Galatians 3:23–29.

Living in your baptismal identity is a daily reality. Greater than your name, job, or zip code is your identity in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Making the sign of the cross is a great daily reminder of your Baptism. Reminding yourself that you are a child of God is another way to live in your baptismal identity.

9. Sharon had to receive Holy Communion at home as a result of her illness. How is this different than the Private Mass of the Middle Ages?

Private Mass in the Middle Ages claimed to be an extraordinary work of forgiveness; it was over and above the ordinary Mass that other people took part in. Receiving Holy Communion at home does not promise some sort of special forgiveness; rather, it is an extension of the ordinary Word and Sacrament ministry of the local congregation.

Chapter 8

1. Read Genesis 2:7. What comes to mind when you think of a creature? What is necessary for a creature to exist?

Some people may find *creature* to be a strange word for humans. *Creature* can connote creepy, crawly animals. However, the word *creature* simply indicates a created being. Creatures are dependent upon a creator for existence.

2. Hardship led Job to question the hidden mind of God. Does God not approve of creatures asking questions? Read Matthew 7:7-11.

On the contrary, God encourages His creatures to ask many things of Him. It is important to keep the Creator and creature distinction in place. Prayerfully asking God for a blessing is different than trying to assume the role of Creator and demanding to know the hidden mind of God.

3. Jesus referred to His disciples as friends. How are friendships formed? What does it tell you about God that He befriends human creatures?

Friendships are often formed as a result of close proximity. The fact that Jesus calls His disciples friends shows that He dwelt closely with His disciples. God befriending human creatures is proof that God does not dwell far from His people.

4. Read John 1:14–18. How did so many people overlook God dwelling among them?

Many people overlooked God dwelling among them because He dwelt in human flesh. Jesus performed many miracles, taught with authority, and conquered death. Nevertheless, there were still many who refused to admit that God was dwelling among them.

5. Read John 15:26–27. What are the two different names Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit here? What do these names tell us about the work of the Holy Spirit?

Jesus calls Him the Helper and the Spirit of truth. These names reveal that the Holy Spirit helps believers in truth. These names reveal the nature of the Holy Spirit.

6. Erasmus concluded that people had the freedom to choose salvation or damnation. How does Scripture depict the human will? Read Ephesians 2:1–10.

Scripture, unlike Erasmus, depicts the human will as bound by sin. Ephesians tells us that we are dead in sin and without the freedom to choose salvation, but God has chosen salvation for us.

7. God has revealed everything necessary for salvation in Jesus. What questions do you still have for God? Why might God have left these questions unanswered for you?

Many people have questions for God: Why did I have a miscarriage? Why did I get cancer? Why did my mother die when I was young? These questions, though troubling, are not essential to our salvation in Jesus.

8. You cannot answer life's difficult questions without knowing Scripture. What is your practice of Bible reading? Do you read the Bible daily? How might a habit of Bible reading help you answer life's questions according to Scripture?

It is important to have a habit of Bible reading. This lets God's Word norm our thinking, acting, and living. Without a practice of reading the Bible, it is impossible to answer life's questions according to God's revealed truth.

9. Tim and Hannah lived in the tension of trusting in God despite multiple miscarriages. Why should you pray even if God answers your prayers according to His will? Read Luke 18:1-8.

God is good. He is not an unjust judge. His will is better than we could ever imagine. He encourages us to come to Him with our prayer, and He promises to listen. Even though God answers prayers according to His will, He desires for us to come to Him in prayer.

Chapter 9

1. Read Philemon 17–19. Paul offered to pay any debts required of Onesimus. What other occurrences in Scripture are there of a debt paid on someone else’s behalf?

Jesus on the cross proclaims, “It is finished” (John 19:30). This expression was also used in the ancient world to declare that a debt had been paid in full. Jesus paid the full price of our sin.

2. Jesus gave Andrew eternal purpose. How did Andrew’s work as a fisherman serve others for a lifetime? How did Andrew’s work as a disciple serve others for all eternity?

Andrew served others as a fisherman by providing food for people to eat and participating in the local economy. As a disciple, Jesus used Andrew to proclaim the Gospel, build the kingdom of God, and deliver Christ’s forgiveness to others. This work extends into all eternity.

3. Before Jesus transformed the life of Zacchaeus, how was his work as a tax collector supposed to serve others? How did Zacchaeus distort his work to serve himself instead?

Zacchaeus was supposed to collect the honest amount of taxes and then faithfully deliver those to the government. However, he distorted his work and used it as an opportunity to serve himself by skimming money off the top and taking more than he was supposed to take. This was a common practice among tax collectors.

4. Read Ephesians 2:8–10. How has Jesus given you eternal purpose? How has Jesus made you useful to God and others?

In Christ Jesus, we are the workmanship of God capable of doing good works. He has taken us from a purposeless life of sin and given us the purposeful life of faith. Through faith in Christ, our life is a good work for God and neighbor.

5. What comes to mind when you think of a calling? Can a job be a calling? Can a calling be a job? Read Ephesians 6:5–9.

A calling often brings to mind a profound and special task; someone has a calling to work with orphans in a third world country. However, a calling is not limited to special or extraordinary tasks. A job is a calling. God calls us to work as accountants, mothers, fathers, cashiers, pastors, nurses, and countless other tasks.

6. Read Philippians 2:12–13. How does it change your perspective on work when you realize that God works in and through your work?

God's work in and through our work transforms our perspective on daily tasks. Changing diapers is God at work caring for a little one. Attending a town council meeting is God fostering order in the community. God is at work through us. This has a profound impact on our work ethic. We do holy work because God is working through us; cutting corners, laziness, lying, and cheating stand in the way of God's work through us.

7. People often struggle to find a clear sense of identity and purpose in their lives. Agree or disagree? How have you seen others struggling with identity and purpose? How have you personally struggled with identity and purpose?

Many people struggle with a lack of identity. It is very easy to attach our identity to something transient like a job, relationship, or political party. People pour themselves into these things, hoping to feel a sense of identity.

8. Read Acts 19:11-12. What work was God doing through Paul's hands? What work does God perform through your hands?

God was performing miracles through Paul's hands. It is important to note that God did not have to work in this way. And even today, God works through our hands to provide for the needs of others, heal their brokenness, and protect their vulnerabilities.

9. Even though Scott was not working for a church, God was working through him to care for others. Is it harder to see how God is at work in some vocations than it is in others? Does this mean that God is less active in these vocations?

There are some vocations where it is obvious how God is at work. Doctors are the healing hands of God. Pastors are the voice of God proclaiming the Gospel. Mothers are the caretakers of God's children. However, other vocations are subtle with how God is at work. Landscapers are the caretakers of creation. Bakers provide food for people to eat. God is at work in all vocations.

Chapter 10

1. How have you personally experienced the disintegration of local living? Is technology to blame?

A simple litmus test for this question is to ask how many neighbors you know by name. Can you name a dozen by name? five? two? Technological advances do make it easier to avoid community; garage-door openers make it so that you never have to get out of your car to talk to a neighbor.

2. Read Luke 3:23–38. Luke begins with extensive details about the genealogy of Jesus. Why might modern readers easily dismiss these genealogies? Why were these genealogies vitally important to early Christians?

Modern readers may fail to see the importance of these genealogies. However, early Christians would have a much better knowledge of the individuals listed in the genealogies. This list locates Jesus in an actual, local community.

3. Read Matthew 13:53–58. Why was God dwelling locally in Jesus of Nazareth problematic for so many people? Did it go beyond the fact that they knew Jesus as a child?

Proximity made it hard for people to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Nevertheless, it was not only because they knew Him as a child. It was scandalous to think that God would lower Himself to dwell in a local community.

4. Luther understood the Bible to be a head-on collision between sinners and the mercy of God. Have you ever experienced God speaking to you through Scripture? Read Hebrews 4:11-13.

God speaks to us through Scripture. He kills and makes alive through the living Word of God. Perhaps you have been convicted or encouraged by a Scripture reading. God comes to us through His Word.

5. Read Matthew 13:1-9. Why does Jesus use the expression in verse 9 here and elsewhere throughout the Gospels? How are the ears more important to believers after the ascension of Jesus?

Jesus encourages people to use their ears and hear His message. The kingdom of God has always relied on proclamation to grow and extend. Following the ascension of Jesus, hearing is more important than seeing.

6. Jesus is just as present in the worship service as He is in heaven. Why is the presence of Jesus frequently overlooked in worship? Read Matthew 28:16-20.

Just as people overlooked Jesus when He was dwelling among them in human flesh, it is very easy to overlook Jesus dwelling among us in worship. It is hard to imagine that God would lower Himself to dwell in the worship of the local congregation.

7. The kingdom of God is not segregated. How can the Church on earth better resemble the racial harmony in the kingdom of God?

Valuing the equality and dignity of all races is the first step in promoting racial harmony. Engaging the neighborhood with the Gospel regardless of race or socioeconomic standing is vital to diversity. Open hospitality is another powerful factor in breaking down segregation.

8. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–22. Why are believers told to pray without ceasing? What is your practice of praying for others?

Prayer is not merely an opportunity to get something from God. Rather, prayer is a powerful relationship between God and His people. Developing a practice of prayer is essential to a vibrant life in Christ. Consider scheduling a time in your week that you will commit to an extended period of prayer.

9. The local congregation is a place fit for the King. How has God worked in your life through the local congregation? Where do you see authentic community happening in your church?

God floods the life of His people with blessings through the local congregation. Friendships are made in local congregations. Strength is given through the encouraging words of brothers and sisters in Christ. Powerful words of Christ's forgiveness transform the brokenness of sin. This is the authentic community of the local congregation

