

Today's Light October–December 2018

The following material is linked to the October–December issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about forty-five minutes of study. Feel free to duplicate the questions as needed and use them with fellow *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

To subscribe to *Today's Light*, contact Concordia Publishing House via email at magazines@cph.org, via phone at 1-800-325-3040, or via fax at 1-800-490-9889.

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TODAY'S LIGHT (ISSN 1084-4775) is published quarterly by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968. Subscription rate: 1 year, \$27.00; 2 years, \$50.00; single copy, \$7.00. Periodicals postage paid at St. Louis, MO, and additional mailing offices.

October Week 1 Discussion Questions

October 1–7, Nehemiah 1–13

1. Share your responses to the activity found in the devotion for October 1. What did you learn from Nehemiah's prayer that could be incorporated into your own prayer time?
2. True or false? If someone is doing God's will, the process will always run smoothly and easily. Defend your answer based on Nehemiah's experience. What encouragement can you derive from these facts?
3. According to Nehemiah 5, what did Nehemiah do to help the poor? What might we do today?
4. Why did the people stand (Nehemiah 8:5) as Ezra opened the Book of the Law? Does something like this ever happen in your congregation's worship service? Explain. What difference does our physical posture make as we worship?
5. Reread "Zoom In" for October 5. Express the main idea in your own words.
6. Why did the dedication of Jerusalem's rebuilt wall call for such a rousing celebration?

October Week 2 Discussion Questions

October 8–14, Esther 1–Job 5

1. To what “coincidences” from your own life can you point as evidence of your Lord working on your behalf?
2. The Book of Esther is the last of the Old Testament historical books. How does it fit into the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation? What assurance does it hold for us?
3. What events or facts from the story of Esther particularly touched or encouraged you? Explain.
4. What makes Job such a towering book? You may wish to consult the introduction to Job.
5. “Satan prowls like a lion (1 Peter 5:8), but he is on the Lord’s leash—Job 1:12 and 2:6.” Thus reads “Zoom In” for October 12. What do you understand it to mean?
6. Give an example of the half-truths Job’s comforters used as they talked with him. What makes half-truths so dangerous? How can we overcome them? (If you need help, see the devotion for October 13/14.)

October Week 3 Discussion Questions

October 15–21, Job 6–22

1. Job lurches from doubt to anger to faith and back again. Has this ever happened to anyone you know? What can a Christian do then?
2. Job at times considered God his adversary. When are people today apt to believe that? To what evidence can you point that God is on our side?
3. Has your opinion of Job changed in any way as you've read his story this week? Explain. In what ways is he like you?
4. Sometimes Christians focus on their faith as a source of strength and help in trouble. Why can this be dangerous? What better focus can we have? Explain. (The devotion for October 19 has some helpful hints.)
5. How can the distinction between Law and Gospel (October 20/21) be helpful as we encounter people in pain?

October Week 4 Discussion Questions

October 22–28, Job 23–39

1. What thoughts or passages from this week's readings especially challenged or comforted you?
2. How would you define or describe the wisdom that Job longed for? (See Job 28.)
3. Summarize Elihu's main points as you understand them in Job 32–37.
4. Reread the questions from "Zoom In" for October 27/28. Talk about your answers as you feel comfortable doing so.
5. Why do you think the Lord waited so long before answering Job? Does He at times do the same to us?
6. The Lord did not reveal answers to Job's questions; instead, He revealed Himself. When we're in pain, our mouths sometimes ask, "Why?" But our hearts ask different questions: "Can I trust You, God? Even now? Even in the dark?" How can God's revelation of Himself help us more than a list of logical reasons for suffering might?

October Week 5 Discussion Questions

October 29–31, Job 40–42

1. When have you battled the uncontrollable? What insights does Job 40–41 provide?
2. Review God's speech (Job 38–41). What effect did it have on Job (Job 42:1–6)? What in God's speech did you find especially powerful and moving?
3. What has the Lord been teaching you this month from the books of Nehemiah, Esther, and Job? How will you use these lessons in your life? Pray together about that before you leave today.

November Week 1 Discussion Questions

November 1–4, Psalms 1–18

1. Reread Psalm 1:3. In what ways does this verse describe the mature believer? How does God the Holy Spirit nurture us to maturity according to the psalm? What contrasts does the psalm make?

2. At the time he wrote Psalm 7, David was concerned about the activities of a Benjamite. Benjamites, in the main, supported Saul. From your reading of the psalm, what seem to be some of David's concerns? What is David's prayer concerning this Benjamite? What attributes of God bring David comfort? What message of hope and comfort does this psalm bring to you?

3. "Preserve me, O God" (Psalm 16:1). When, in our own lives, do we pray this same prayer? In the last portion of this psalm (vv. 5–11), David rejoices in the care and protection God provides. Explain some of the pictures David uses to show how God has protected and will protect him and God's people. In Christ Jesus, God especially protects and cares for us until we live safely with Him in eternity. Explain David's confidence in God's messianic promise as he expressed it in Psalm 16:9–10.

November Week 2 Discussion Questions

November 5–11, Psalms 19–53

1. In Psalm 19, David, in effect, says, “I’ve been thinking about You, God. I can really depend on You. I’ve noticed two things, and they both make me ask You to forgive the sins I don’t know about and the ones I do willfully” (vv. 12–14). Why did the splendor of the heavens make David think of his sin (vv. 1–6)? Why did God’s Law make David think of his sin (vv. 7–11)? Do these same things call us to repentance? Why does David call God his Redeemer (Exodus 6:6; Psalm 78:35)? How is Jesus our Redeemer?

2. Psalm 27 is David’s confident prayer of faith and praise to God. Many Christians over the centuries have joined David in his praise. For what did David praise God? In what ways have you seen the goodness of the Lord (v. 13)? David also looked to the future with confidence in the Lord. As you look to the future, which words of God through David in this psalm give you confidence and comfort?

3. Do you ever feel like you live in a besieged city, that you are surrounded by enemies, that you are trapped and out of God’s sight? Then Psalm 31 is for you. In what parts of David’s life do you think he felt besieged and trapped (1 Samuel 19:9–10; 2 Samuel 12:7–9; 15:13–14)? When do you feel this way? What actions of God that provided help to him does David mention in the psalm? In Christ, God acts to provide help to you also. What has God done for you (2 Corinthians 5:19–21; Galatians 3:13–14; Ephesians 2:4–10)? Join David in praising God for His help; read together Psalm 31:19–21.

4. It makes all the difference in the world when a person trusts in Jesus as his or her Savior and knows the salvation that is “from the LORD” (Psalm 37:39). Read Psalm 37 and identify the ways the righteous are different from the wicked who do not trust in God for their salvation. David has a long list. At times, it may seem to the righteous (to us who trust in Jesus) that the wicked have it good or that God is not acting on our behalf. Read aloud David’s responses to such thinking: Psalm 37:34, 39–40. Find other similar responses in this psalm and rejoice in Christ, your Savior.

5. Read Psalm 44 in three sections: verses 1–8, then 9–22, and finally 23–26. Summarize the main idea of each section. With slight modification, this psalm could be set in our own time. What are some of the blessings God has given us for which we might praise His name forever (v. 8)? What are some things today that bring scorn and derision to Christians and put Christians on the defensive (vv. 10, 13, 16)? Do you think Christians today sometimes feel like the psalmist who wrote verses 17 and 22 felt? What is the psalmist’s prayer (vv. 23, 26)? What would you pray for today? Pray your own version of Psalm 44, using its three-part form of listing blessings, concerns, and then requests. At the end of your psalm, thank God because in Christ He has already redeemed us because of His unfailing love (Psalm 44:26). Then check Paul’s response as he reflects on verse 22 of this psalm in Romans 8:35–39.

6. Restate the riddle of the psalmist in Psalm 49:5–6, 10. Do you agree with the idea of the psalmist expressed in verse 12? According to the psalmist, what makes life worth living and gives hope for eternal life (v. 15)? Reflect on the words of others who had similar thoughts: Job in Job 19:25–27; Hosea in Hosea 13:4, 14; 14:1–4, 9; Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:22–23; Peter in 1 Peter 1:18–25; John in 1 John 3:1–3. How would you state the words of wisdom and understanding that the psalmist wants to share (Psalm 49:1–3, 20)? Pray that the Holy Spirit would strengthen this wisdom in you. Sing stanza 2 of “God of Grace and God of Glory” (*LSB* 850) as your prayer.

November Week 3 Discussion Questions

November 12–18, Psalms 54–89

1. What is the basic prayer of every person? Is it not the first words of Psalm 54: “Save me”? Glance through Psalms 54–59. Find verses that contain this prayer. From what things would you have God save you today? In these psalms, find phrases that give assurance that God does save, help, and heal. Then read together Psalm 54:4 and Psalm 59:16–17.

2. What is the “heritage of those who fear Your name” (Psalm 61:5)? Look at these passages for some ideas: 1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Samuel 12:1–14; Psalm 16:6; 26:8–12; 119:111. In this psalm, David seems to fear that his faith is weakening (Psalm 61:2), so he uses a variety of pictures to ask God to strengthen that faith. Identify and discuss some of these pictures. In your own life, what is the “heritage of those who fear Your name”? Identify some ways God gives this heritage to you. Thank Him for this blessing in your closing prayers.

3. How deep in trouble are you? How bad is your sin? How depressing are the problems you face? How did David describe his problems in Psalm 69:1–4, 7, 10–12, 14–15, 19–20? Do these problems sound familiar? We may often feel that we are up to our neck in problems (v. 1), as David did. For what did he pray in this psalm (vv. 1, 6, 13, 16–17, 24, 29)? Of what was he confident (vv. 33–34)? What was his response to God’s salvation (v. 30)? How would other people be helped by his response (v. 32)? What are some messages God gives to us in this psalm? What salvation has God allowed us to see (Luke 2:25–32; John 9:24–38)?

4. Read Psalm 73. Have you ever felt as did the inspired writer in verses 1–14? Summarize what he was thinking. When we see the ungodly prosper, what should we keep in mind? How has God provided for our greatest joy?

5. Can you remember times when God removed burdens and bestowed blessings in your life? Do you live now as if you had forgotten God’s help and blessing? After thinking about these two questions, read Psalm 81:6–10. (The first five verses are a fanfare to get your attention and set the stage for the message that is coming.) What burdens removed and blessings bestowed does God want His people to remember? What one command did the Lord especially want His people to follow (v. 9)? What evidently happened (v. 11)? How did God punish their sin (v. 12)? Of what commandments does this psalm remind you? What is God’s promise when His people follow His commands (vv. 13–16)? How are we similar to the people who heard this psalm when it was originally written? How has God dealt with the fact that all people are too weak to listen to Him (Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 4:4–5)? Now that you have seen God’s mercy and love for you, sing His praises by reading Psalm 81:1.

6. By faith in Jesus Christ, you are God's child. Can you think of ways He has marked you? Scripture speaks frequently of the names of God's righteous ones being written in a Book of Life (Daniel 12:1; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 20:12, 15; 21:27). Psalm 87 gives some indication of what Jesus, the Lamb, will write by the name of each believer. What will He write (Psalm 87:6)? Why does this notation bring joy to the believer's heart (Psalm 78:68; 87:5; 132:12–14; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 14:1)? To conclude your discussion of this psalm, sing or read together stanza 4 of the hymn "Glorious Things of You Are Spoken" (*LSB* 648).

November Week 4 Discussion Questions

November 19–25, Psalms 90–119

1. What truths of Psalm 90 do you find particularly meaningful? In this rare psalm of Moses, what reminders of our failure to follow God's Law and what assurances of His gracious forgiveness does God give us?
2. When the psalmist urges all the earth to sing a new song to the Lord, what does he mean (Psalm 96:1)? What motivates this "new song" (vv. 2, 5, 10, 13)? How is Revelation 5:9–10 related to this psalm? Summarize the psalmist's petition in this prayer.
3. Psalm 103 is one of the most beloved psalms of Scripture, probably because it describes so fully the many loving things God does for us. List some of God's loving acts that you find described in the psalm and explain why these acts are so treasured by people. Say together and memorize a favorite verse. For all of the loving acts of God included in the psalm, it almost seems as if the praise verses at the end (vv. 20–22) are too short, but these verses use a triple call for angels, heavenly hosts, and God's works to praise Him. Then the psalmist says to himself, "Bless the LORD, O my soul!" (v. 22). Point to yourself when you say this line.
4. What does the word *redeemed* mean to you? See Psalm 107:2. Job prophetically speaks of the Messiah as his Redeemer (Job 19:25); at Easter, Christians sing, "I know that my Redeemer lives," confident that the risen Jesus has delivered us from sin, death, and the devil through His suffering, death, and resurrection. In Psalm 107, the psalmist urges the redeemed to speak of their redemption to others. Note the five groups he urges to speak of their redemption: the wanderers (vv. 4–9), those in bondage (vv. 10–16), the foolish (vv. 17–22), the sailors who experienced trouble (vv. 23–32), and the wicked desert dwellers (vv. 33–42). Read each section and note for what each group is to give God thanks (vv. 6, 8, 15, 21, 31, 36, 38, 41). For what might you give God thanks during this time of national thanksgiving? Be sure to give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love delivered through Christ Jesus.
5. Psalm 117 is the shortest of all the psalms. It also is the approximate center of the Bible. In this crucial spot in Scripture, what profound truths does it present? Why not use it at your family Thanksgiving gatherings to thank and praise God, who has saved you through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.
6. Here's a mental-math question for you: If Psalm 119 is comprised of twenty-two segments, each with eight verses, how many verses does Psalm 119 have? If you want to learn the Hebrew alphabet, look at the heading of each section of the psalm. Pick your favorite segment to discuss with your group. In almost every one, the psalmist praises God for some blessing he receives from God's Word. What blessings do you receive

from God's Word? To conclude your session, pray that you might receive God's message from His Word as you prepare for participating in worship this weekend.

November Week 5 Discussion Questions

November 26–30, Psalms 120–150

1. What do you talk about when you're taking your daily walk? Or when you're traveling in the car? Read Psalm 121 in your group, each one reading one of the sentences. The psalm is a conversation between people as they travel to Jerusalem, but it could be a conversation between people as they travel anywhere, even on the road to heaven. What are some of the ideas shared between travelers in the psalm? What is the primary thought in the psalm? While we do not see or recognize all of the ways God watches over us, what are some of the ways that you see God watching over you? Look at the following passages for ideas and then thank God for His watchful care: Psalm 119:105; Matthew 26:26–28; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:23–32; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 1:14. Pray this psalm whenever you travel; close your session with stanza 5 of the hymn “Now Rest beneath Night's Shadow” (*LSB* 880).

2. What are the “pleas for mercy” (Psalm 130:2)? Why does the psalmist think he needs mercy (v. 3)? Taking into consideration all the thoughts and deeds of your life, could you stand before the Lord's throne proudly? What are the types of things that condemn us before God? What is the hope of the psalmist (vv. 4–5)? What words of the Lord would give the psalmist hope (Genesis 3:15; 12:2–3; 22:18; Exodus 34:6–7; Deuteronomy 7:7–9; 2 Samuel 7:11–13; Psalm 89:34–37)? Which words of God give you hope? Check these words of Scripture: Isaiah 53:4–5; John 3:16; Acts 2:38–39; Romans 5:8; Hebrews 10:19–23. Share other words of Scripture that give you hope.

3. How does Psalm 134 foreshadow the work the Messiah would do for us? Refer to the devotion for November 28 in your discussion.

4. Read Psalm 139. What are some of the insights about God and ourselves that this psalm provides?

5. What more appropriate way to end a book, a month, or a church year than to recount the many blessings God has given and then to thank and praise Him for His mercy. Do you know of any lists of God's blessings? Look up and read the explanations of the First, Second, and Third Articles of the Apostles' Creed and the explanation of the Fourth Petition in Luther's Small Catechism. These are essentially lists of God's blessings. Identify the blessings listed in Psalm 147. What items would you add to the psalmist's and Luther's lists? Now get out your instruments and praise the Lord by reading selected verses from Psalms 149 and 150. Then praise the Lord with your group in feasting and in anticipation of more blessings during the coming Advent season.

December Week 1 Discussion Questions

December 1–9, Proverbs 1–17

1. Define wisdom as Solomon uses this word in Proverbs (Proverbs 1:7). What makes this wisdom our most precious possession (Proverbs 2:6–22)? In the Advent hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” we sing of Jesus as the “Wisdom from on high” (*LSB* 357:2). How is Jesus wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Timothy 3:15)?
2. “The foolish stumble over God’s wisdom. They rail against it and often try to repeal the penalties reality exacts from those who resist it.” Give examples from the world around you that illustrate this quotation from the devotion for December 2, which focuses on Proverbs 3–4. Believers sometimes stumble in these same ways. Explain. What remedy does our Lord provide (Hosea 14:1–2, 9; John 6:63; Acts 1:8; Galatians 3:13; 5:22–23; Ephesians 5:15–21)? Identify several wise things mentioned in Proverbs 3–4 that the redeemed will do.
3. Proverbs 5–7, except for Proverbs 6:1–19, is a call to reserve sexual relations for marriage, to be faithful to one’s marriage partner, and to respect the marriages of others. It is ironic and unfortunate that one of God’s greatest gifts to people—our sexuality—is one of the most adulterated. Its misuse results in catastrophic hurts, both physical (sexually transmitted diseases) and social (broken homes, abused spouses, hurt children). In your group, identify some of the pictures Solomon used to encourage his readers to be faithful in marriage and to reserve sexual relations for marriage. Such is God’s love and grace that He even offers forgiveness for all of these sins through His Son. Read and discuss some of His gracious promises: Isaiah 1:18; John 3:16; 8:1–11; 10:10; Hebrews 10:19–25; James 5:11.
4. From Proverbs 8–9, we can get a picture of what godly wisdom—“the fear of the LORD” and “knowledge of the Holy One” (Proverbs 9:10)—is like. What are some of the characteristics of godly wisdom? How is the invitation of godly wisdom different from the invitation of Folly (vv. 4–6 and 16–17)? In your closing prayer, pray that God the Holy Spirit would endow the members of your group with godly wisdom.
5. Read Proverbs 10:29. How can the way of the Lord be destruction to someone and a stronghold to someone else? Use these biblical references to clarify your thinking: Matthew 19:16–30; 23:1–36; John 6:60–69. Pray that the way of the Lord would be for your salvation and life with Him.

6. How is the first proverb of Proverbs 13:19 a fitting proverb for Advent? Refer to some of the Advent readings to stimulate your thinking and meditation: (Advent 1) Jeremiah 33:14–16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13; Luke 19:28–40; (Advent 2) Malachi 3:1–7b; Philippians 1:2–11; Luke 3:1–14 (15–20).

7. Solomon urged us to be slow to get angry (Proverbs 14:29). When is anger sinful? When is it just? When might it be wrong not to get angry? When did God get angry (John 2:14–17)? How did God's anger at sin benefit us (Romans 6:23)?

8. When can Christians be guilty of “practical atheism,” saying we believe God's commands and promises, but living as if we are the ones on whom our well-being and success depend? What makes Proverbs 16:6 such good news for us?

December Week 2 Discussion Questions

December 10–16, Proverbs 18–29

1. What warning do you read for your own personal life in Proverbs 19:27? What instruction is especially valuable to all people (2 Timothy 3:14–17)? How might God use each of you in this group to encourage the others to avoid the danger mentioned in this proverb?
2. Do you remember any punishments you received in childhood? Did they accomplish what Solomon says they do in Proverbs 20:30? Isaiah asked why God's children should be struck down anymore (Isaiah 1:5). Why had they been struck down (Isaiah 1:2)? How did God redeem His children and forgive their sin (Isaiah 1:18; 53:4–6)?
3. Read these passages: Proverbs 22:6, 19; 23:12. According to these passages, what should be one of the primary concerns of Christian families and congregations? Identify ways that families and congregations follow Solomon's urging. What is the focus of this training (2 Timothy 3:14–17)? What are some ways Bible study groups support these efforts? Pray for the programs and individuals who are involved in the Christian training of all in your congregation.
4. Read Proverbs 25:13. Then read Luke's account of John the Baptist's ministry and Jesus' evaluation of his work (Luke 7:18–28). In Jesus' eyes, was John the Baptist a faithful messenger who was a refreshing voice? Explain your thoughts. When are we faithful or trustworthy messengers who bring refreshment to God's Spirit?
5. In Proverbs 26–27, Solomon warns about many types of people and many activities that do not bring honor to God and that are contrary to God's commandments. Identify several types of people and several of these activities that are all too common in our own time also. What is God's remedy for these ills (Psalm 65:3; Ezekiel 16:59–60, 63; Romans 3:21–26; Hebrews 2:17; 9:14)? Praise God for His atoning love using the words of the hymn "Christ, the Life of All the Living" (*LSB* 420).
6. Read in unison the first half of Proverbs 28:12 and Proverbs 29:2. Give examples of the truth of these statements from your own experience. These statements account for the joy Christians have, especially during the Advent, Christmas, and Easter seasons—our righteous God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, triumphs over sin, death, and Satan. The Advent readings from Zephaniah 3:14–20 and Philippians 4:4–7 ring with triumphant joy. Why is Zephaniah rejoicing? Why does Paul urge the Philippians to rejoice? To rejoice together, sing an Advent hymn of joy, such as "Hark the Glad Sound" (*LSB* 349).

December Week 3 Discussion Questions

December 17–23, Proverbs 30–Ecclesiastes 8

1. Proverbs 31:10–31 is a description of a noble woman—a wonderful mother and wife who serves the Lord. It is also a review of Proverbs, a review of the qualities people have who are wise and fear the Lord (Proverbs 1:7). Identify some of the qualities of the person who fears the Lord that are mentioned in this section. Then thank God for His blessings of wisdom and the fear of the Lord that He has given you in Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank God also for the many Christian women who serve the Lord Jesus in our country, homes, and churches.

2. Why do we like things that are new and become dissatisfied with old things? The writer of Ecclesiastes lamented that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). He was searching for meaning in life. What things did he think were meaningless vanities? What gives meaning to life? What gave Elizabeth and Mary meaning for their lives (Luke 1:39–56)? Ask God that these same things give meaning to your life and Christmas celebration.

3. Solomon says that “whatever God does endures forever” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). What are some of the things God has done that will endure that we celebrate during the Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany seasons? See these texts for some ideas: Matthew 1:21; 2:1–2, 14–15; 3:13–15; Luke 1:46–56; 2:10–11; 22:19–20. What is the Christian’s response to these eternal blessings (Luke 2:13–20)?

4. Read Ecclesiastes 5:19–20. Similar thoughts are expressed in Ecclesiastes 2:24–25 and 3:12–13. Summarize the idea in these passages. How does God keep you occupied with joy in your heart? Thank God for this gift.

5. “I’m an old sinner. Nothing shocks me,” Charlie Chaplin once commented as he tried to find out the sins of another. We are all sinners (Ecclesiastes 7:20). In fact, we search for ways to sin. Read Ecclesiastes 7:29 and Romans 5:12. What evidence is there today that people are always searching for ways to sin—and finding them? What is the only way out of this prison (Romans 3:10–26)? Sing “Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising” (*LSB* 375) to praise Him for His deliverance.

6. What are some things Solomon has learned about sin and wickedness that he reports in Ecclesiastes 8? What has he learned about God-fearing people? Identify and describe some qualities of a God-fearing person. What are some of the blessings God brings to His people through His Son that we celebrate at Christmas?

December Week 4 Discussion Questions

December 24–31, Ecclesiastes 9–Song of Solomon 8

1. Some years back, Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Solomon's response to that title would be, "Wait a minute! Bad things happen to both good and bad people. In fact, good things happen to both good and bad people." Find this idea in Ecclesiastes 9:2–3, 11. Of what statement of Jesus does this idea remind you (Matthew 5:45)? What else does God offer to all people, regardless of whether people say they are good or bad? See these Scripture passages for ideas: 2 Corinthians 5:15; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 2:2. During this Christmas, celebrate the birth of your Savior who is also the Savior of all people (Luke 2:10–11, 32). Pray also that all people who hear the Gospel would believe in Jesus and trust Him for their salvation.

2. *Remember*—that is the word for Ecclesiastes 12. What does Solomon want his readers to remember (Ecclesiastes 12:1)? When does Solomon want this remembered (vv. 1–8)? Where can trustworthy things to be remembered be found (Ecclesiastes vv. 11–12)? What is the most important thing to remember (v. 13)? God's people of all time have remembered what God says. What did Mary remember (Luke 2:19)? What does God want us to remember (Ephesians 2:11–13)? What do we want God to remember (see stanza 3 of the hymn "O Savior of Our Fallen Race" [*LSB* 403])?

3. Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), a Lutheran writer, interpreted the Song of Solomon, a conversation between Solomon and his beloved, as a picture of the loving relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church. Christ is the Lover and the Church is the Beloved. Identify and discuss several phrases in Song of Solomon 1 that describe the mutual love between Solomon and his love and between Christ and the Church. Solomon's love pictures herself as being imperfect (Song of Solomon 1:6). In what way is the Church imperfect? Yet, Solomon loves his love; Christ loves the Church (Song of Solomon 1:8, 15; Ephesians 5:25–28). In your closing prayer, thank God for His faithful love of the Church and pray for His blessing on all marriages.

4. An adjuration is an earnest bit of advice or urging that is given and asks the hearer to take an oath to follow the advice. An adjuration is included twice in Song of Solomon 2–3, at 2:7 and 3:5. Minus the witness of creation, it occurs again in Song of Solomon 8:4; a similar one is in Song of Solomon 5:8. Notice the call to take an oath ("I adjure you") on the basis of God's creation ("by the gazelles or the does of the field"). What is the advice given by the bride who has just experienced the joys of the consummation of marriage (Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)? To whom is the advice given? How might this advice be worded in today's culture? How are both Law and Gospel contained in these adjurations?

5. Read Song of Solomon 4:7. Brides may feel this way about their husband-to-be and grooms may feel this way about their brides. Soon, however, everyday living will reveal the faults of each one. With Christ, however, things are different. Why can Christ declare so confidently about His Bride, the Church, that “there is no flaw in you” (Song of Solomon 4:7; see 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:25–27; Titus 2:11–14; Hebrews 10:14)? What has Christ done to make His Bride, the Church, beautiful (Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 7:13–14)?

6. The question asked in Song of Solomon 5:9 could be restated, “How is your lover better than any other lover?” Since this lover, Solomon, is a prophetic picture of Christ, the question proposed is, “How is Christ better than any other god?” The bride’s answer in Song of Solomon 5:10–16 describes her husband and concludes “he is altogether desirable” (v. 16). Some of the picture language in Song of Solomon 5:10–16 proclaims why Christ is worthy to be called our Savior (Revelation 5:9) and why He is better than any other god. Where does Song of Solomon 5:10–16 picture the three offices of Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King? Where does it picture the humanity and divinity of Jesus? Is salvation through Jesus proclaimed in this section of Song of Solomon?

7. Read Song of Solomon 8:6–7. These verses have been called the “theological highlight” of the book. What is the purpose for placing a seal on a legal document or diploma? How is this seal related to Baptism and a love as “strong as death” (v. 6)? Identify some characteristics of God’s love as described in Song of Solomon 8:6–7. What is God’s message to you in these verses?

Leaders Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

October Week 1 Leaders Notes

1. Let participants share their responses to the open-ended sentences in the devotion for October 1. If anyone has trouble with this exercise, refer back to the text itself (Nehemiah 1). Then let the group talk about aspects of Nehemiah's prayer that we sometimes neglect in our own prayers, especially praise and reminding the Lord of His promises.
2. Let participants comment. The answer is false. Nehemiah's experience shows us that even when we are doing God's will, we will often experience roadblocks. Perhaps especially when we are doing God's will we will experience roadblocks—Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature will surely oppose us. The difficulties that we face need not discourage us, however. We know that our Lord will deliver us from every evil and will empower us to do those things He has set aside for us to do. Often the difficulties we encounter motivate us to find other, better ways to go about the mission of our Savior!
3. Nehemiah insisted that the secular and religious leaders of the people undo the wrongs they had perpetuated upon their fellow Jews—the exacting of usury, enslaving their own countrymen, and taking their property. While the Bible's message centers first and foremost on the Savior, God also wants us to look to the physical needs of others. Participants might discuss opportunities to volunteer their time, talents, and treasures for this kind of work.
4. Refer participants to Nehemiah 8:5. The people stood—seemingly spontaneously—as Ezra opened the Book of the Law to show reverence and respect for God's Word. In many congregations, the people stand for the reading of the Gospel each week. This also is intended to show respect for God's Word and especially for the work He has done in our Savior, the Lord Jesus. Talk about the way that physical posture aids our worship. We kneel at the altar to receive Holy Communion. This helps us demonstrate our humility and thankfulness. We often kneel in prayer at other times too. Perhaps participants will mention kneeling to confess their sins. Accept comments like these from the group, and point out that since God has created us as physical creatures, the position of our bodies does matter as we worship. Encourage the group to experiment with different prayer postures from time to time. For instance, King Solomon raised his hands to heaven as he dedicated the temple—and rededicated his nation—to God's glory (1 Kings 8:22).
5. Ask participants to paraphrase. Allow volunteers to comment. This question is an important one because it emphasizes the reality of God's willingness to forgive us in Jesus.
6. The devotion for October 6/7 answers this question in detail; refer participants to that reading if necessary.

October Week 2 Leaders Notes

1. This question calls for participants to share personal experiences in which God acted on their behalf. Refer the group to the devotion for October 10 if they need more help.
2. By saving the Jews from extinction, God (through Esther) kept alive His promises of the coming Messiah. From the descendants of Abraham would come the Savior of the world. This assures us that no matter how impossible the circumstances of life might be, God is in control and carrying out His loving, saving activity.
3. Let volunteers comment. Share your own thoughts as time will allow.
4. Job is a towering book because it takes up one of the most challenging themes of all—why do the righteous suffer? More than that, it is written in a grand, poetic style.
5. The Lord limits Satan's activity here on earth. Our enemy does prowl around like a roaring lion, but he can only do what God allows him to do. This can be of great comfort to us, because our gracious Lord will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to withstand the temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).
6. Let volunteers look at the devotion for October 13/14 if they need help finding examples of half-truths that Job's comforters used as they talked with him. Be sure everyone understands that this in no way detracts from the doctrine of inspiration. It simply acknowledges that Scripture often records comments and conversations by human beings and not everything that comes out of the mouths of these characters is God's divine truth. Therefore, we must be careful in trying to draw doctrines from the book of Job. We must be sure that other passages of Scripture affirm what a particular passage from Job says.

Of course, God's words at the end of the book are true in every respect. Half-truths can be very dangerous because often they sound so plausible, and our sinful flesh so often resonates with them. This is particularly true of much of what Job's first three "comforters" said to him. Half-truths are dangerous because they lead us to believe things about our heavenly Father that are not true; they can cause us to question His character and motives—just as Job did.

October Week 3 Leaders Notes

1. Job lurches from doubt to anger to faith and back again. Let participants talk about times this has happened in their own lives. If they do share an instance from the life of someone else, urge them to keep the example anonymous. All believers at one time or another probably ride the roller coaster that Job experienced. Our highs and lows may be less extreme than Job's were. Or maybe not. In any case, when we feel ourselves in doubt, despair, or anger at God, we can go to Him with these problems and ask for His help and strength. In Jesus, we always receive this.
2. Let participants comment on times when people today come to consider God their enemy. As evidence of God's faithfulness to us, refer participants to Romans 8. Jesus' work for us in His life, death, and resurrection is proof positive that God is on our side.
3. This question calls for opinions on the part of participants. Share your thoughts with one another. Especially focus on the ways that Job's story is like our story. How are we like Job—in his impatience, in his faith, in his anguish, in his despair, in his trust despite circumstances?
4. We focus our confidence not on our faith but on our Savior. Our faith may seem to ebb and flow from day to day, but God's love in Jesus never fluctuates. When we focus on ourselves, we are likely to be thrown into either despair or sinful, self-focused confidence. How much better to focus on Jesus and His cross. Refer the group to the devotion for October 19 as well.
5. The proper distinction between Law and Gospel is outlined in the devotion for October 20/21. This devotion also discusses the practical application of these doctrines as we minister to people in pain and doubt.

October Week 4 Leaders Notes

1. This question calls for opinions on the part of the participants. Take as much time as you can to discuss this item. If the group is silent at first, allow participants time to think. You might also encourage group members to look back on the Bible texts and the devotional readings from last week.
2. Job longed for God's wisdom. Particularly, he asked again and again for an umpire. He was longing for the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus Christ. The devotion for October 23 has further insights. Refer participants to that reading.
3. Accept the contributions of several volunteers as the group tries to distill Elihu's main points. Perhaps the titles of the sections of Job 32–37 in the various Bibles that participants bring to class will be of some help. Elihu points to God's wisdom and strength and to the fact that He is just. Job's case is before heaven's court. Job can wait in confident hope for the verdict of that court (35:14).
4. This question calls for some personal sharing on the part of participants. Don't force anyone to confess his or her sins publicly. You might begin by sharing your own answers first. Do that authentically and without either bragging or despairing. Then encourage other group members to share things that they are comfortable sharing. Before you leave this question, assure one another again of God's forgiveness for all our sins.
5. If God had immediately brought relief to Job, there would have been little or no growth in faith and understanding. As Job struggled with his sufferings and the Lord's place in them, he came to resign himself to God's will. At times, God prolongs our trials. As we learn that we can't make things happen or make God do our bidding, we rely more fully on Him to do as He pleases, which is always for our good.
6. The devotions for October 27/28 and 30 both address the issue. Refer the group to those devotions.

October Week 5 Leaders Notes

1. Again, this question calls for personal sharing. Let volunteers comment as they refer to Job 40–41 and the devotion for October 29.
2. God's speech brought Job to repentance. He came to realize the foolishness of questioning the Lord's power and goodness. Participants will comment on various aspects of the magnificent speech. Look for features of the poetry, the descriptions of nature, the questions God raised, and the examples of God's watchfulness over His creation (implying, of course, His people as well as other aspects).
3. Let group members comment. Encourage them to refer back to readings from previous weeks. Urge participants to step back far enough that they can see the events of Nehemiah, Esther, and Job all from one vantage point. What insights does this perspective provide?

November Week 1 Leader Notes

1. Refer participants to Psalm 1:3 and to the devotion for November 1. Mature believers are described by the psalmist as trees planted beside streams of water. Be sure that participants recognize that the Holy Spirit uses His Word to nurture us and to promote spiritual growth. Note the psalm's structure, with verses 1–3 standing in contrast to verses 4–5, and the closing verse (6) restating the contrast between the godly and the wicked.

2. David was convinced that the Benjamites were pursuing him and seeking to kill him (Psalm 7:2). He also was concerned that he may have done something—what, he did not know—to invite their anger (vv. 3–4). David prayed that God would save him from the Benjamite (v. 1) and judge the person righteously (v. 6). David also prayed that God would judge him righteously (v. 8) and bring an end to all the violence so that God's people could live in safety (v. 9). David placed himself in God's keeping, trusting in God's righteousness and justice (vv. 11, 17). We in our own time are concerned about our own safety, the constant violence in the world, and unfair accusations of doing wrong. In Christ, God, “who tests the minds and hearts” (v. 9), has dealt mercifully with our sin, satisfying His justice by placing our punishment on Him. We take comfort in knowing that, as He has done in the past, God will deal justly and rightly with all people in our own time and that He still offers forgiveness and safety through Jesus, our Savior.

3. Members of your group will probably identify times of illness, war, financial insecurity, stress, and unknown challenges as times when they pray for God's protection and safety. David, who had similar concerns, praises God for His protection by mentioning that God has given him many good things (Psalm 16:2), including faithful saints around him (v. 3), a fine inheritance that includes much land (vv. 5–6), and the counsel of God's Word (v. 7). David especially mentions his confidence that God will take him to heaven to enjoy “pleasures forevermore” (v. 11); he rejoices that God will not let him languish in the grave, but will resurrect him (vv. 9–10). Jesus, of course, is the Holy One who abandoned the grave and did not see decay. He suffered for our sins and rose from the grave to give all who trust in Him safety and “pleasures forevermore.” Pray an Easter hymn to close your study.

November Week 2 Leaders Notes

1. The heavens reminded David of God's majesty and His creative power. The sun reminded David that nothing, including his own heart, could escape God's scrutiny (Psalm 19:6). God's Law brought many blessings to David. Your group may want to list some of these blessings. For David, one blessing was that God's Law warned him about his sin. This reminder (v. 11) prompted David to ask God to forgive his unknown (hidden) sin, to keep him from committing willful (presumptuous) sins (vv. 12–13), and to praise God for being his Redeemer. God is our Redeemer. Just as He delivered Israel from Egypt (Exodus 6:6) and David from his sin (2 Samuel 12:13), so God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, delivers us from the punishment of our sin. We have "redemption through His blood," Paul says (Ephesians 1:7).
2. In Psalm 27, David particularly praised God for who He was—David's light, his salvation, and his stronghold. David praised God for keeping him safe (Psalm 27:5, 10). Give the members of your group the opportunity to identify the goodness of the Lord that they have seen. As we look to the future, we can be confident, as David was, that God will keep us safe, especially as we see Him dwell among us with His Word and Sacraments (v. 4), provide safety and shelter (v. 5), take us into His keeping (v. 10), and shower us with His goodness (v. 13). All this He will do, for Christ's sake, in His good time (v. 14), for which we wait with confidence and trust by the grace of the Spirit.
3. David, no doubt, felt besieged when Saul was trying to destroy him, when Nathan confronted him with his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, and during Absalom's rebellion. Members of your group will have times in their lives when they have felt besieged by hard times and Satan; give them a short opportunity to talk about these times if they so choose, but save plenty of time to talk about the help God gave to David and the ways He has helped us in Christ. David mentions that God showed His wonderful love to him (Psalm 31:21) and heard his pleas for mercy (v. 22). In his life, David was blessed with God's protection many times: God provided guidance for him, God blessed David by expanding and strengthening Israel and making it a powerful kingdom, and God forgave David's sin. For each of us, God reconciled us to Himself through His Son, redeemed us from the curse of the Law, and raised us with Christ to do good works (2 Corinthians 5:19–21; Galatians 3:13–14; Ephesians 2:4–10).
4. These are some of the ways that David identifies that the righteous are different from the wicked: the righteous will receive God's inheritance, but the wicked won't (Psalm 37:9–11); the wicked have no heart for the poor and needy (v. 14); the wicked borrow and do not repay, while the righteous give generously (v. 21). Your group will find many more. To the idea that the wicked have it good and that it seems God does not act on behalf of His people, David responds confidently, "the LORD upholds the righteous" (v. 17). Your group will find other similar phrases scattered throughout this psalm. Encourage them to share these verses and read together Psalm 37:34, 39–40.
5. Help the members of your group summarize the three sections of Psalm 44. The psalmist first thanks God for giving Israel the Promised Land. Then he asks God why He has permitted His people to be defeated and scorned by His enemies, in spite of the fact that they have been faithful to God (Psalm 44:17). Finally, the psalmist asks God to wake up and help them because of His love for them. Discuss the ideas in the psalm and think of similar contemporary blessings, concerns, and requests. List the ideas so that you can include them in a concluding prayer. Then read and reflect on Paul's response in Romans 8:35–39.

6. The psalmist's riddle basically is this: Why should we be afraid when evil surrounds us, because even those who cause the evil die? No one can save another. The psalmist's thought is that God will save, redeem, and deliver him when no one else can (Psalm 49:7, 15). Job, in the midst of his misery, proclaimed that he would be delivered by his Redeemer and would see Him in eternity (Job 19:25–27). Hosea lived confidently, knowing that his Redeemer would forgive his sins and redeem him from death (Hosea 13:4, 14; 14:1–4, 9). Paul knew that the only wisdom valuable in life was that Christ had been crucified; this knowledge is what gave life meaning and joy (1 Corinthians 1:22–23). Peter knew that the blood of Christ brought forgiveness and a fulfilled life (1 Peter 1:18–25), and John taught that the love of God in Christ Jesus made us His purified children (1 John 3:1–3). By faith, the psalmist knew that, through the promised Messiah, God would redeem him; no evil could harm him or take God's love from him. By God's grace, you, too, have that saving faith. Pray the prayer of the hymn.

November Week 3 Leaders Notes

1. In their need—and whatever their need—people pray, “O God, save me” (Psalm 54:1). Your group will be able to find many verses in Psalms 54–59 that repeat this prayer. Some examples are Psalms 55:1–2; 56:1; 57:1; 58:6; 59:1. Encourage the members of your group to share their own versions of this prayer (Lord, save me) today. What are the concerns from which we want God to rescue us? These psalms also contain many verses that assure us that God does save, will save, and has saved. These verses are especially assuring: Psalms 54:4; 55:22; 56:12–13; 57:3; 58:11; 59:16–17. Your group will find others. Discuss the assurance that God gives in the psalm verses you find. In Christ Jesus, God has delivered us from sin and every evil. Read this assurance in Colossians 1:13–14, 19–22. Close your study by reading the verses from the psalms and singing the doxology, “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow” (*LSB* 805).

2. Invite your group members to share their ideas about what the “heritage of those who fear Your name” is (Psalm 61:5). For David, his heritage would include being identified and anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel; in some way, the Spirit of the Lord nourished David’s faith from then on (1 Samuel 16:13). The Lord also sent the prophet Nathan to instruct David, to call him to repentance, and to announce forgiveness to him (2 Samuel 12:1–14). Another aspect of David’s heritage was that he was chosen to rule over the land God had given to His people (Psalm 16:6). David was nourished in faith through the worship at the Lord’s house (Psalm 26:8–12) and God’s Word (Psalm 119:111). In Psalm 61, David asks God to continue to protect him, as He has in the past, by providing a high rock as his refuge, by letting him take shelter under His wings, and by providing a strong tower to defend him. In our own lives, God has provided a spiritual heritage for us: people who have taught us His Word; Christian education opportunities where our faith has been nurtured; Christian families that taught us, cared for us, and prayed for us; Christian congregations where God’s Word was taught and the Sacraments offered. We share in the rich heritage of those who fear God’s name. In your closing prayers, thank God for this heritage that He has used to announce His grace in Christ Jesus to you.

3. David used picturesque language to describe his problems: the waters were up to his neck, he sank in the mire, the flood waters were sweeping over him, more people hated him than he had stems of hair (We presume David wasn’t bald!), his throat was parched from crying, when he repented people made fun of him, and no one was available to comfort him. At times our sin and problems mount up as David’s did for him. Perhaps some in your group will want to share how their problems are similar to David’s. David prayed that God would save him (Psalm 69:1), that others would not be put to shame because of his sin (v. 6), that God would answer him out of His steadfast love and abundant mercy (vv. 16–17), punish his enemies (v. 24), and let His salvation protect him (v. 29). In response to God’s salvation, David promised to give praise to God (v. 30) so that others might also rejoice (v. 32). In this psalm, we are encouraged to share our problems and concerns with our Lord. We trust in Him for deliverance because He has already given us deliverance from sin in His Son. We, along with Simeon, have seen God’s salvation (Luke 2:30). We, too, by the power of the Spirit, see our salvation, as did the blind man (John 9:35–38).

4. At times, believers become frustrated, impatient, and even envious when they see how people who are ungodly and openly despise God seem to prosper in this world. The psalmist states, “My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:2–3). Discuss: Was the psalmist’s picture of the wicked an accurate one (vv. 4–12)? Ultimately, their “end” (v. 17) is anything but pleasant, he discovers; they are “destroyed” (v. 19). All this the psalmist Asaph came to understand when he “went into the sanctuary of God” (v.

17). Through His Word, God guides us and afterward “will receive [us] to glory” (v. 24). Rather than concern ourselves with the situation of the wicked and arrogant, the Spirit teaches the psalmist, and us, that God is always with us, guiding us. God is our strength; in Him we will be satisfied (Proverbs 19:23). He will take care of everything else in the world, so leave what happens to others up to Him. Christ is our Savior; that is the greatest blessing of all.

5. Provide opportunity for members of your group to recall burdens that God has removed and blessings that He has given. Also discuss ways we live that indicate we have forgotten God's blessings. God essentially wants His people to obey the First Commandment (Psalm 81:9); when we do that, obedience to other commandments will follow. When we follow His commands, God promises He will subdue our enemies (vv. 13–14). Since we are too weak to resist the devil and the temptations he places before us, God, in Christ, obeyed the commands for us, lived perfectly under the Law, and suffered punishment for our sins on the cross (Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 4:4–5). Through His life, death, and resurrection, we are forgiven and strengthened to live for Him. Praise Him for His gracious love and forgiveness in Christ with the words of Psalm 81:1.

6. Members of your group might mention that at their Baptism they were marked with the sign of the cross. On Ash Wednesday, some congregations follow the practice of marking the foreheads of believers with the sign of the cross to indicate forgiveness of sin through Jesus. The Scriptures refer to another way that God takes special note of those who trust in Him for salvation: He writes their names in the Lamb's Book of Life (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 21:27). The psalmist says that God will write, “This one was born in Zion” (see Psalm 87:6). Our joy is that our home is heaven, the home God established for us (Psalm 87:5); we belong there. Our citizenship is with God in heaven (Philippians 3:20); we have all the benefits citizens of heaven enjoy—living with a God who loves us (Psalm 78:68; Hebrews 12:22) and who cares for our every need (Psalm 132:12–14), and praising God for His salvation (Revelation 14:1). Sing the hymn stanza as your prayer of thanks and praise.

November Week 4 Leaders Notes

1. Psalm 90, the only psalm of Moses, speaks of death as God's judgment on sin: "All our days pass away under Your wrath" (Psalm 90:9). But it also points to God's power overcoming death: "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us" (v. 17). Through Christ, we enjoy the blessings of the Gospel, which include forgiveness and eternal salvation. Encourage the members of your group to summarize the petition in this prayer: Lord, You constantly protect us. Though time flies and our days are marked by trouble and sin, teach us to live rightly according to Your Word, and may the gift of Your salvation rest on us.

2. The psalmist calls on people of all nations and cultures to praise the only true God. Praising the Lord who provides salvation, who made the heavens, and who judges with equity (Psalm 96:2, 5, 10) will be a new song for many who previously worshiped other gods. In Revelation 5:9, the hosts of heaven praise God with a new song in which they are thankful for the Lamb who died to ransom people of all nations for God. Each new day of our lives lived for Him is a new song of praise to God for the salvation He has freely given in Christ Jesus.

3. Some of the loving acts of God that your group members might find in Psalm 103 are the following: God forgives our sin, heals diseases, satisfies us with good things, brings justice for the oppressed; He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but removes them far from us. Encourage your group to share their list and to choose a favorite verse to memorize that reminds them of God's love. Rejoice in God's love for you in Christ Jesus, who "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10) and join the angels in His praise as you repeat the closing sentence of the psalm.

4. *Redeemed* means "delivered." Christ delivered us from sin and death. The psalmist urges those who have been redeemed to tell others of the way God delivered them: the wanderers should speak of God's leading (Psalm 107:7); those in prison should speak of how God burst their bonds apart (v. 14); the foolish should speak of His healing (v. 20); the sailors should speak of His stilling of the storms and His guidance (vv. 29–30); and the wicked should speak of His calling them to repentance with hard times (vv. 33–34) and His blessings (v. 38). Read verse 43 and close your session with a prayer of thanksgiving for the redemption God has given you in Christ.

5. Not only is Psalm 117 the shortest psalm, it is also the shortest chapter in the entire Bible. Despite its brevity, Psalm 117 is a gem as it speaks of God as the Lord of all nations. The psalmist praises God for His great love for us and His faithfulness that lasts forever. God was faithful to us in that He kept His promise to provide a Messiah by sending His own Son, Jesus, to save us. Paul referred to this psalm in Romans 15:11 and used it as a call to bring the Gospel to all people. Why? God gives His love to all people. Through the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, all nations can know God's love and salvation. What a privilege it is to share that Good News! Praise the Lord using the words of this psalm as you continue to celebrate Thanksgiving season.

6. Answer: 176. As you discuss various portions of Psalm 119 that your group members choose, notice the blessings of God's Word that the psalmist cites. Here are some examples. Those who follow God's Word are preserved from doing wrong and being shamed (Psalm 119:3, 6); God's Word provides wonderful counsel (vv. 18, 24); God's Word strengthens us (v. 28); God's Word guides us (v. 105). In each section, the psalmist prays that God would strengthen him to follow God's Word. Let that also be your prayer. According to His Word of promise, in Christ Jesus, God has preserved our lives (v. 107). Ask God for His blessing as you meditate on His Word today and for His Holy Spirit to guide you in living according to His Word.

November Week 5 Leaders Notes

1. Read Psalm 121 together, each person speaking a sentence, to emulate travelers talking as they travel. In the psalm, the people assure one another that God provides help to them, watches over them wherever they go in life, and allows no harm to come to them “from this time forth and forevermore” (v. 8). God provides this watchful care to us through His Word (Psalm 119:105), in the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26–28), through relationships with other Christians (Acts 2:42), through self-examination in the light of God’s Word in preparation for receiving the Sacrament (1 Corinthians 11:23–32), through Baptism and the working of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), and through the work of His holy angels (Hebrews 1:14). Assure one another of the Lord’s watchful care by using the words of the hymn stanza.

2. Essentially, a plea or cry for mercy is a deeply felt request for help from one who is helpless. That is the nature of our confession of sin. Because of our sinful nature and life, none of us can stand before God proudly or enter eternal life on the basis of our own merit. The psalmist knew he could not stand before God, weighted with sin as he was (Psalm 130:3). Our sin condemns us also. The psalmist’s hope is in the merciful promises of God that were made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel, David, and a psalmist (Genesis 3:15; 12:2–3; 22:18; Exodus 34:6–7; Deuteronomy 7:7–9; 2 Samuel 7:11–13; Psalm 89:34–37). Encourage members of your group to read the various Scripture passages and identify the message of hope that the announcement of forgiveness of sins through Jesus, the Savior, brings. Provide opportunity for your group to share their own favorite Scripture passages that give them hope and comfort.

3. Psalm 134 pictures Christ’s work for us as our High Priest and Intercessor. He offered Himself for our sins. He continually intercedes for us before the throne of God. He was the one perfect Servant of the Lord described in Psalm 134:1. Because He has served us, we can serve Him and His people. Not only *can* we, we *want* to do that because we have seen His deep and endless love for us in His life, suffering, and death for our salvation and in His resurrection from the grave.

4. Psalm 139 vividly brings out three characteristics of God—His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. He is omnipotent—that is, all powerful, the creator of all: “For You formed my inward parts” (Psalm 139:13). He is omniscient—that is, all-knowing: “Before a word is on my tongue, . . . You know it altogether” (v. 4). He is omnipresent—that is, present everywhere: “Where shall I go from Your Spirit?” (v. 7). Moreover, David speaks of God’s creation of the individual “in my mother’s womb” (v. 13). God begins life at conception and continues His love and concern for us into eternity. His love moved Him to give His Son to save all people (John 3:16). God understands us completely and deals with us so lovingly that, like the psalmist, we can entrust ourselves into God’s hands for eternity (Psalm 139:24). As we pray this psalm, we join the psalmist in his praise.

5. Encourage your group to note the many blessings God has given to us as they are mentioned in the explanations of the articles of the Apostles’ Creed and the Fourth Petition. Encourage your members to add to the list special blessings in their lives. Praise and thank God for His blessings by reading verses from Psalms 149 and 150. In this way, you join the saints of old in praising God for His many blessings and for the grace and mercy shown to us in His promised Messiah, Jesus, our Savior.

December Week 1 Leaders Notes

1. As Solomon uses the word *wisdom* in the Book of Proverbs, he means a right relationship with God that includes reverence and honor toward God, willing obedience to His commands, and trust in His promises. This is possible only because of the righteousness that belongs to us as God's gift. Wisdom is the opposite of foolishness, which tries to live life as though God did not exist, His commands did not matter, and His Word is unimportant. For those who believe God's promises of a Savior, the message of salvation through Jesus Christ is wisdom. The Advent hymn speaks of Jesus as the "Wisdom from on high" because Jesus is God come to earth to bring us the knowledge that our sins are forgiven through Him. Paul speaks of wisdom in Christ Jesus that is related to our "righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30); through the Scriptures, we are given the wisdom about Jesus Christ that leads to salvation (2 Timothy 3:15).

2. Let participants give examples to illustrate that approving wickedness does not "blunt the power of sin to wreck lives" as the December 2 devotion says. Laws may protect salacious speech, but it still damages lives. By living contrary to God's Word, believers sometimes stumble in the same ways that the foolish do. We, too, still battle Satan and our sinful flesh while we live here on earth. Godly wisdom is to recognize that the Lord's ways are right (Hosea 14:9), to repent when we fail to follow His ways (Hosea 14:1–2), to trust in Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins (Galatians 3:13), to live as God's people (Ephesians 5:15–21), and to do the works of God (Galatians 5:22–23). The Holy Spirit gives this wisdom by His power (John 6:63; Acts 1:8). By the Spirit's power, the redeemed will keep God's commands, trust in the Lord, and shun evil (Proverbs 3:1, 5, 7). Your group will be able to identify many more wise activities of believers contained in these chapters.

3. Spend a short time helping your group identify several ways that people are tempted to misuse their sexuality. Film, books, music, and TV often make sex outside of marriage appear to be attractive and common. Revealing pictures are frequently used in advertising. To encourage avoiding temptation, Solomon used several pictures, including the following: don't go near her door (Proverbs 5:8), be aware of the pain of wishing you had done differently when you were young (vv. 11–14), drink from your own well (v. 15), don't carry fire near your body (6:27), and be aware of the allure of a prostitute at work (7:10–20). It is ironic and unfortunate that Solomon, who wrote these proverbs and who observed the hurt and punishment that God gave to his own parents because of their infidelity, should himself succumb to similar temptations. His fall into temptation should be testimony to us all about the frailness of our ability to withstand temptation. God's Word is clear about His will that we honor Him with our bodies and not commit adultery. It is also clear that His forgiveness in Christ is offered for these sins. Isaiah spoke of the purity God would give (Isaiah 1:18). John spoke of God's love that prompted Him to give His Son to die so that those who believe may have eternal life (John 3:16). John also records that Jesus forgave the adulterous woman as well as taught others of their own need to repent, be forgiven (John 8:1–11), and have the full life God intends (John 10:10). The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that the blood of Jesus cleanses our guilty consciences and washes our bodies clean so that we can "stir up one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24), and James reminded his readers that the Lord is compassionate and merciful (James 5:11).

4. These are some of the characteristics of godly wisdom: godly wisdom makes true, honest, and right statements (Proverbs 8:6–7); it is the most valuable possession

anyone can have (v. 11); it gives reliable counsel and insight (v. 14); it results in just rule (vv. 15–16, 20); it has been present from creation (vv. 23–31); it brings a full life with God (v. 35). Folly is the opposite of godly wisdom. Godly wisdom's invitation is a simple one, inviting everyone to eat and drink the bread and wine God has prepared. (John refers to this idea when he writes that Jesus spoke of Himself as the bread of life [John 6:35]. It is a reminder to us of the blessings of forgiveness and life that God brings to us in the Lord's Supper.) Folly's invitation offers the bogus claim that "stolen water" and secretive eating is sweet and delicious (Proverbs 9:17). Godly wisdom focuses on Christ and the cross (1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:17–18; Colossians 2:2–3). One prayer for wisdom that your group might want to use is stanza 5 of the hymn "One Thing's Needful" (*LSB* 536).

5. For some, the riches and good things of this world are more attractive than the treasures of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the creation is more important than the Creator. The First Commandment becomes their stumbling block. Many biblical examples could illustrate this thought. Even though he had led an exemplary life, the rich young man could not give up his many possessions to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:16–30); God's way—having no other gods before Him (First Commandment)—became a ruin for him. For the Pharisees (Matthew 23:1–36), God's way—acknowledging Jesus as the promised Messiah and giving up their attempts to convict Him of blasphemy—became a ruin for them. Repenting of their sin and putting on God's image, as Jesus instructed them to do, was impossible for them. For some of Jesus' disciples, believing in Him for eternal life was too much of a hurdle; God's way was a ruin for them—they deserted Jesus. Peter and ten of Jesus' disciples, through the work of the Spirit, confessed, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68–69). Join heartily with your fellow congregation members as you sing this confession in your worship services.

6. The readings for the first two weeks of Advent all point to the sweetness and joy that come to all people when the Savior, the "Desire of nations" (*LSB* 357:7), arrives. When God fulfills His promise, Jeremiah says, the righteous Branch will "execute justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15)—sweetness for the soul, to be sure. Paul searched for words to express his thanks for the coming opportunity he hoped to have to build the Thessalonian Christians in faith through the Gospel so they would be "blameless in holiness before our God and Father" (1 Thessalonians 3:13). When the people praised Jesus for being "the King who comes in the name of the Lord," they anticipated the fulfillment of their desire for peace and deliverance (Luke 19:38). Malachi rejoiced that the Lord would suddenly come to His temple and purify the people (Malachi 3:1–7b), and Paul thanked God that the good works that God had begun to produce through the Philippian Christians would be completed and that through Christ they would "be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10). John the Baptist rejoiced that he could announce the good news of the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah to the people (Luke 3:1–20). All of these illustrate that "a desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul" (Proverbs 13:19).

7. Anger is sinful when it leads to sinful thoughts and actions. For instance, if our anger leads us to hatred or to revenge, we have definitely fallen into sin. On the other hand, not all anger is sinful. In fact, it might be wrong not to get angry when we see innocent people damaged by injustice or the wickedness of others. Jesus Himself became angry on several occasions. Once, He made a whip with cords and drove animals and money-changers out of the temple. He did this in righteous anger at the desecration of His Father's house (John 2:14–17). The righteous anger of God that our sin provoked was focused on Jesus on the cross. He took our punishment to turn God's anger from us (Isaiah 12:1) that we might receive pardon and peace and live without anger, because God in Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 2:4–5; 4:31–32).

8. The devotion for December 8/9 explains the sin of “practical atheism.” Let participants give examples of “practical atheism” from their own lives and explain the good news of Proverbs 16:6. Our Lord Jesus has provided atonement for the sins of hypocrisy and unbelief, and He alone works true reverence, faith, and holy fear in our hearts so that we can walk free of the sins that so easily entangle us and live lives guided and directed by His Word.

December Week 2 Leaders Notes

1. Proverbs 19:27 warns us against the dangers of ignoring or neglecting God's Word. When we do this, we are likely to stray away from God's words of knowledge and forget His Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:14–17). The final end of that road is eternal destruction. Encourage group members to talk about how they can help one another to steadfastly study, believe, and obey the revealed Word of God (Acts 2:42).

2. Perhaps some group members will relate stories of childhood punishments they received. Ask if they ever committed the offense again. Isaiah raised the question of why the children of Israel should be struck down anymore (Isaiah 1:5). They had suffered much, especially during the exile in Babylon, yet sin persisted among them and their worship was not genuine (Isaiah 1:13). God's remedy was to cleanse their sin (Isaiah 1:18) and transfer the punishment to His Servant (Isaiah 53:4–6). Note the parallel wording in Isaiah 1:5–6 and Isaiah 53:4–5. In Christ, blows and wounds cleanse away our evil and beatings purge our inmost being (Proverbs 20:30). Praise God for His comforting Gospel.

3. Solomon urges God's people to be diligent in the religious training of children and to continue that training throughout the lives of people. In light of Solomon's comments, one of the primary activities of Christian families and congregations must be Christian education. Paul urges Timothy to continue following the Christian teachings he has learned from his mother and grandmother because through the study of Scripture God makes us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Continued study of Scripture also equips God's people to refute error, live God-pleasing lives, and encourage others in their Christian faith. Pray for your pastors, teachers, Sunday School volunteers, youth leaders, Bible study leaders, and others who teach God's Word among you.

4. Solomon says that a faithful and trustworthy messenger is a joy to those who send a message; a faithful messenger is as refreshing as a cold snow at harvest. Jesus considered John the Baptist to be such a messenger because he faithfully called people to repentance and announced forgiveness of sin through the Lamb of God (Luke 3:1–22). When we teach others God's Word, bring them the comfort and joy of the Gospel, and use God's Word to correct, we are refreshing messengers. Review the explanation of the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer; the petition is a prayer that we would be trustworthy messengers who refresh God's Spirit by faithfully teaching His Word and living according to it.

5. Proverbs 26–27 warn about boasters and sluggards (Proverbs 26:12–16); meddlers and deceiving jokers (Proverbs 26:17–19); gossips (Proverbs 26:22); malicious people and liars (26:24–28); and the angry, jealous, and unfaithful (Proverbs 27:4, 8). Members of your group will probably find others. Knowing that we are overwhelmed with sin, God forgives transgressions (Psalm 65:3). Ezekiel proclaims that God remembers His covenant and makes atonement for "all that you have done" (Ezekiel 16:63). The apostle Paul explained to the Romans that the "righteousness of God" comes to us through faith in Christ Jesus, who offered Himself as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins (see Romans 3:21–26). Through His sacrifice, Christ purified our consciences so we could "serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14; see 2:17). In the hymn, praise God that Jesus suffered "Even death by crucifixion, Fully to atone for me; . . . Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto Thee" (*LSB* 420:6)

6. Encourage your group to provide examples of the joy that comes when righteous people and right causes prevail. Zephaniah rejoiced that the Lord was present to take

away the judgments against the people. The Lord was there to save them and quiet them with His love (Zephaniah 3:15, 17). Paul rejoiced with the Philippians that the Lord was at hand and bringing His peace (Philippians 4:4, 7). In the hymn, rejoice together that the Savior comes.

December Week 3 Leaders Notes

1. Some of the qualities of a person who, in wisdom, serves the Lord are the following: brings good to every situation, plans ahead and is industrious, is wise and frugal in managing property and resources, is skilled and sympathetic to those in need, takes care of the family, is dignified and strong, has a good sense of humor, and speaks wisely. These characteristics mirror the fruit of the Spirit Paul mentions in Galatians 5:22–23. Pray that the Spirit would give these gifts in your own life and the lives of those you know and thank Him for His blessings given in Christ Jesus.
2. Ask your group to share their ideas as to why we like new things. We like new things and ideas because they make life interesting. We have learned that new things can often save us work and make life easier, new things can make travel to interesting places possible, and new things can improve health care and safety. New things have many benefits. For Elizabeth and Mary, what gave their lives meaning and purpose was what God was doing in their lives. For Elizabeth, God was not only removing a personal reproach by giving her a child, but He was giving her the purpose of raising a child who would prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. For Mary, God had given her a great purpose also—to be the mother of the Lord (Luke 1:43). For Christians, our purpose in life is to praise and honor God for the grace and mercy He has shown to sinful people by sending His Son to be the Savior of all. Sing an Advent hymn to praise God for His love and mercy.
3. God's acts to redeem the world through His Son will last forever. By God's grace, Mary gave birth to Jesus and named Him Jesus "for He will save His people"—all people of all time—"from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus came to save Gentile people forever (2:1–2). Through Jesus, God fulfilled every prophecy (2:14–15) and the Law was kept perfectly for us (3:13–15); these, too, last forever. Mary rejoiced that God was sending a Savior who would bring enduring blessing from generation to generation (Luke 1:46–55), and the angel announced news of great joy "for all the people" (Luke 2:10). As we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember the forgiveness God gives to every generation through the body and blood of His Son. As did the shepherds, we worship the newborn King, glorify and praise our God for all that He has done, and tell this Good News to others (Luke 2:13–20).
4. The idea that Solomon voices several times in Ecclesiastes is that God gives the gift of joy to people through the work that they do and the blessings they receive through that work. It is a joyous and comforting thought that God will keep us occupied with joy so that we do not remember the difficult days of life. May the joys of the newborn Savior keep you occupied throughout the new year and bring you joy even in the face of difficulty.
5. Invite the members of your group to provide examples of instances where people seemingly search for ways to sin—and are successful. God did make people upright at creation; Adam and Eve had no sin. Since the fall, people seek many schemes to sin (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Paul describes this folly graphically in Romans 3:10–18. Only "by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" is there deliverance from this prison (Romans 3:24). Praise Him for His deliverance by singing the hymn.
6. Solomon learned that (1) wickedness holds on to those who practice it (Ecclesiastes 8:8); (2) when wickedness is not punished, people turn to wrongdoing (v. 11); (3) sometimes the wicked are treated as if they were righteous (v. 14); and (4) it's not possible to understand why some wickedness occurs (v. 17). Solomon also is confident that reverent, God-fearing people will fare better than the wicked (v. 12).

Since God by grace has forgiven and sanctified all people through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, it will definitely be well with those who fear God. To further explore this insight, read and discuss the following texts with your group: Romans 3:20–26; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Ephesians 2:4–10; Colossians 1:10–14. At Christmas, we especially celebrate the forgiveness and peace the Savior brings (Luke 2:14).

December Week 4 Leaders Notes

1. Good and bad things happen to all people. Solomon does not want God's people to think that bad things only happen to them or that they should have a monopoly on the good (Ecclesiastes 9:2–3, 11). Death happens to all. We also need to be cautious about labeling who the good and the bad people are. Believers and unbelievers do both good and bad things, both can be fine leaders and examples, and both can be criminals. God offers salvation through His Son to all people. Believers in Christ live with the hope of eternal life through the saving merits of Jesus Christ. To close your meditation, pray that all people would trust in the newborn Savior for the forgiveness of their sins.

2. Solomon urges his readers to remember their Creator in the days of their youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1). He mentions many conditions and stages of life when our Creator should be remembered: in good weather and bad (v. 2); when we are old, our teeth are bad, the frailties of old age abound, and we are near death (vv. 3–5); and when we die (vv. 6–7). The things that are to be remembered are found in God's Word, the collected sayings of the Shepherd (v. 11). Solomon concludes that we are to remember to fear God and keep His commandments and let God take care of everything else (vv. 13–14). Mary remembered all the events of the birth of the Savior; she remembered not only her Creator, but also her Redeemer (Luke 2:19; also Luke 1:47). Paul reminds us to remember that at one time we were separated from God by sin, but now Jesus Christ has brought us near to God by His blood (Ephesians 2:11–13). The hymn is a prayer asking God to remember that He took upon Himself human flesh to save "our fallen race." Rejoice with your group that God in Christ has saved us; sing a Christmas carol.

3. References to the mutual love between Solomon and his love, and thus between Christ and the Church, are in the following verses in Song of Solomon 1: verse 2 (Christ's love is better than fine wine), verses 4 and 7 (the Church wants to be with Christ as lovers want to be together), verses 12–13 (Christ brings a sweet-smelling fragrance to the Church—the fragrance of His offering to God for our sins [Ephesians 5:2]). In Old Testament times, being deeply suntanned was not a desirable trait for a woman. The Beloved's description of herself as darkened by the sun (Song of Solomon 1:6) can be a picture of the Church, imperfect with sin. Your group may want to discuss some of the ways the Church and its people give evidence of sin. Christ, however, still loves the Church and gave Himself for her on the cross to make her beautiful (Song of Solomon 1:8, 15; Ephesians 5:25–28) and provides a wonderful example for all husbands to love their wives. In your closing prayer, thank God for His faithful love for the Church and pray for His blessing on all marriages.

4. The bride, the Beloved, urges her hearers, the daughters of Jerusalem who represent all of us, not to become involved sexually with anyone except within marriage and to avoid anything that would stimulate passionate love until the right time—within marriage. In today's culture, this would warn against becoming overly involved with suggestive literature, pictures, movies, television, or participating in pornography and sexual intimacy prior to marriage, including cohabitation. These warnings are in keeping with God's Law as stated in the Sixth Commandment, for example. The faithful love within marriage that is advocated is exemplified by Christ's love for His Church, which was given at just the right time (Galatians 4:4), was faithful to God's norms in the face of the temptations of Satan and the world (Luke 4:1–13), and was sacrificial in nature (1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:24–26). In effect, this adjuration calls the Church to be faithful to Christ, who in His life, suffering, death, and resurrection, has faithfully kept God's promises and been faithful in His love for all people.

5. Christ can say of His Bride, the Church, that “there is no flaw in you” because He Himself has washed it of all sin and impurity (Song of Solomon 4:7; see 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:25–27). This is especially made evident in our Baptism. Christ the Lamb has clothed the Church with “garments of salvation” and “a robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 7:13–14). In this regard, see also Galatians 3:27–28 and Revelation 21:2. To praise Christ for clothing you with salvation, your group may want to sing the hymn “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness” (*LSB* 563).

6. In our day, many religious discussions involve the questions, Is one religion better than any other? Is there only one true God? The daughters of Jerusalem ask Solomon’s bride, “How is your beloved better than others?” Her answer is in Song of Solomon 5:10–16. Her description of her Beloved is a picture of Christ. His humanity is evident in her reference to his radiance and ruddiness; Luther interpreted this to say that Christ was present with us in the priestly functions associated with Word and the Sacraments—Word, water, bread, and wine. Only kings would wear gold and jewels and have the riches mentioned. Hints of the temple and Christ’s priesthood are included in references to the foundation of “bases of pure gold” and alabaster columns and the cedars of Lebanon used in the construction of the temple. The triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is better than any other god because in Christ, as true God and true man, He sacrificed Himself for our salvation and now rules, through Christ, in heaven.

7. In Old Testament times, stamping a seal or signet on a document indicated ownership. In Baptism, God places His seal on us, marking us as His children and giving us the Holy Spirit to guarantee our inheritance of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:13–14). God’s love for us is as “strong as death” (Song of Solomon 8:6). In fact, in Christ, His love overcame death and the grave (Romans 1:4). God’s love, a flame of fire, overcame death and the grave (Revelation 1:12–18) and gives believers in Christ a bodily resurrection. No water can drown God’s love. In Baptism, believers in Christ are buried with Him into death and raised with Him “to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Luther’s Small Catechism, Baptism, Fourth Part). These words of the Song of Solomon assure us that God’s love in Christ is completely unshakeable and unyielding; nothing can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

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