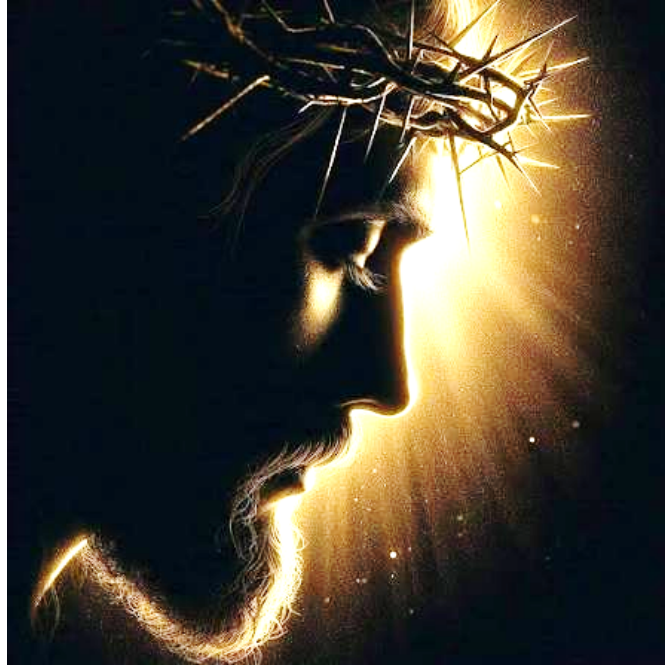


JESUS



FOR IN THROUGH

By Bill Cullen, 2026

(All Scripture passages are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted)

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Welcome to *Five Characteristics of a Christian:* A Seven-Week Journey of Grace

Welcome to this seven-week study exploring what it means to live as a Christian—deeply loved, fully justified, and continually being formed by Christ. This series invites us to slow down, listen, reflect, and grow together as we consider five core characteristics of the Christian life. As our guide states, “*A Christian is deeply loved and fully justified, yet a fallible person who is maturing in...*” five interconnected ways:

- Trusting in Christ in all things — ***Jesus FOR us***
- Living from God’s Word and Sacraments — ***Jesus IN us***
- Loving neighbor in concrete ways — ***Jesus THROUGH us***
- Bearing witness to Christ naturally and humbly — ***Jesus THROUGH us***
- ***Daily repenting, returning to Christ*** for forgiveness and hope — the ongoing cycle of grace

These weeks are not about mastering a checklist or achieving spiritual perfection. They are about rediscovering the beauty of the Gospel—that *God acts first*, that Christ is the center, and that the Holy Spirit continues His work in us day by day. Our study guide reminds us, “*The Christian life begins with Jesus being FOR us. It grows by Jesus being IN us. It comes to fruition with Jesus being THROUGH us.*”

Throughout this study, we will listen to Scripture, reflect on the wisdom of the Reformers, and engage in honest conversation about our lives, our struggles, and our hopes. We will mark words and phrases that stir our hearts, ask questions that matter, and encourage one another as fellow travelers in Christ’s Kingdom.

This is a journey of grace—grace received, grace forming us, and grace flowing through us. It is a journey of learning to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2), and discovering again and again that He truly has our past, our present, and our future held in His nail-scarred hands.

As we begin, come with openness. Come with curiosity. Come with expectation. **Christ is FOR you. Christ is IN you. Christ works THROUGH you.** And together, we will explore what that means for our lives, our community, and our witness in the world.

Welcome to the journey.

Serving through Christ & His Love,

Bill Cullen

5 Characteristics of a Christian

Session One

Read aloud. As the below is read (suggested by a variety of people), note and mark words and/or phrases that catch your attention or raise questions for you.

This lesson is an introduction to a seven-week study in which we will reflect on five characteristics of being a Christian. Sessions two through six will take each of the five characteristics individually. Session seven will be a summary, putting everything together as a composite whole. We will be exploring...

A Christian is deeply loved and fully justified, yet a fallible person who is maturing in...

1. Trusting in Christ in all things. **(Jesus FOR)**
2. Living from God's Word and Sacraments. **(Jesus IN)**
3. Loving neighbor in concrete ways. **(Jesus THROUGH)**
4. Bearing witness to Christ naturally and humbly. **(Jesus THROUGH)**
5. Daily repenting, returning to Christ for forgiveness and hope **(A Cycling of the Above)**

We begin with words from Scripture.

Ephesians 2:8-9 “*By grace* you have been saved, *through faith*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Matthew 7:16 “By their fruit you will recognize them.”

Galatians 5:22-23 “The *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control.”

1 John 4:7-8,19 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for *love comes from God*. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.... ¹⁹We love because *he first loved us*.”

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. *As I have loved you*, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

1 John 3:16 “This is how we know what love is: *Jesus Christ laid down his life for us*. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are *God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus* to do good works.”

Grace has been popularly defined in an acrostic as **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**. A Christian is someone who, through faith, receives God’s grace in its many forms (not the least of which is eternal salvation). This truth is anchored and reflected in the three Solas of the Reformation:¹

- **Sola Gratia** – we are saved and blessed by GRACE alone,
- **Sola Fide** – which we receive (not earn) through FAITH alone,
- **Sola Scriptura** – as it is defined, explained, and described in SCRIPTURE alone.

However, people in the USA tend to view themselves/ourselves as an entitled people, rather than a blessed people. The more we believe ourselves to be entitled because...the less we feel ourselves blessed. Because I am a USA citizen..., because I am educated..., because I work hard..., because I am white, black, or what color one is..., because I am Christian..., because..., I deserve (merit)....

Christians aren’t entitled. Christians are blessed (Romans 3:23-25; Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Christians are blessed not *because* of anything they/we are, because of anything they/we do, or because of anything they/we bring to the equation. Christians (anyone who in faith receives Christ and His grace) are blessed solely **BECAUSE** of who God is and **BECAUSE** of what Jesus has done, because of what Jesus brings to the equation.

- ***Discuss the things you noted—the thoughts, questions, and/or concerns that you had as we read and reflect upon what has been shared so far.***

“If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed.
If you look within, you’ll be depressed.
If you look at Christ, you’ll be at rest.”
Corrie Ten Boom —

¹ Some theologians add **Sola Christus** (Christ Alone) and/or **Sola Deo Gloria** (God’s Glory Alone). Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers would have understood Sola Christus as being the substance and source of Sola Gratia. Technically, we are not saved *by* FAITH, but *through* FAITH. We are saved solely *by* GRACE (what Jesus did FOR us on the cross) and not by any contribution of our own; *we receive* this GRACE *through* FAITH *alone*, nothing else. The GRACE received through FAITH *is a living thing* IN us that *naturally bears* FRUIT THROUGH us – John 15:4-5; Philippians 2:12-13. FAITH is not something a person generates within oneself. It is the product of the Spirit’s work in us through Word and Sacrament.

Jesus FOR Us — Jesus IN Us — Jesus THROUGH Us

Again, read aloud. As the below is read (suggested by a variety of people), note and mark words and/or phrases that catch your attention and raise questions for you.

Hebrews 12:2 “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith....”

JESUS FOR US – Justification/Salvation

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

1 John 4:10 “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

JESUS IN US – Sanctification/Transformation

Galatians 4:19 “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,”

Philippians 1:6 “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

JESUS THROUGH US – Vocation/Mission

Galatians 5:6 “In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Philippians 2:12-13 “Continue to work out [live out] your salvation...¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

Matthew 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

John 15:8 “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

- **FOR** – Jesus saves us by His grace.
- **IN** – Jesus is formed in us through His Means of Grace (Word & Sacrament, Confession & Absolution).
- **THROUGH** – Jesus sends us to love our neighbors and bear witness to His Love and Presence.

The Christian life is learning to live this reality more deeply every day.

- ***Discuss the things you noted—the thoughts, questions, and/or concerns that you had as we read and reflect upon what has been shared so far.***

"It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone." – **John Calvin, Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote, 1547 polemic tract, 6th Session, Canon 11.**

"We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds, but having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds." – **Martin Luther, his letter to Christoph von Scheurl, March 5, 1518.**

"It is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly." – **Martin Luther, from his Preface to Romans (1522)**

"The Apostle has prescribed this rule for the life of Christians, namely, that we should devote all our works to the welfare of others, since each has such abundant riches in his faith that all his other works and his whole life are a surplus with which he can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor." – **Martin Luther, Treatise on Christian Liberty**

"From Christ, the good things have flowed and are flowing into us. He has so "put on" us and acted for us as if he had been what we are. From us they flow on to those who have need of them, so that I should lay before God my faith and my righteousness that they may cover and intercede for the sins of my neighbor, which I take upon myself and so labor and serve in them as if they were my very own. That is what Christ did for us. This is true love and the genuine rule of a Christian life." – **Martin Luther, Treatise on Christian Liberty**

"We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise, he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith, he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love, he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love." – **Martin Luther, Treatise on Christian Liberty**

"Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus is the **"alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end"** (Revelation 1:8). The Christian life begins with Jesus being **FOR** us. It grows by Jesus being **IN** us. It comes to fruition with Jesus being **THROUGH** us. "Fix your eyes on Jesus," it is all about **JESUS!** The Holy Spirit daily continues His work in us through the Gospel. Through the Gospel, He calls us to repentance, to strengthen our faith, and to produce the fruit of love (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Luther, in his Small Catechism, regarding the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed, writes,

"I believe that I cannot, by my own understanding or effort, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him. But the **Holy Spirit** has **called** me through the Gospel, **enlightened** me with His gifts, and **sanctified** and **kept** me in true faith. In the same way, He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church day after day, He fully **forgives** my sins and the sins of all believers."

God acts! Our faith response is **a stimulated response to the Spirit's Gospel/Grace stimulus** initiated and communicated through Word and Sacrament.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is [received through] faith..." (Romans 1:16-17).

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

"God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

"Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

- ***Discuss what you noted, your thoughts, questions, and/or concerns that you had as the above Scriptures and Reformation quotes were read.***

Again, read aloud and mark.

A Christian is deeply loved and fully justified, yet a fallible person who is maturing in

- 1. Trusting in Christ in all things. (Jesus FOR)**
- 2. Living from God's Word and Sacraments. (Jesus IN)**
- 3. Loving neighbor in concrete ways. (Jesus THROUGH)**
- 4. Bearing witness to Christ naturally and humbly. (Jesus THROUGH)**
- 5. Daily repenting, returning to Christ for forgiveness and hope (A Cycling of the Above)**

Together, these five trace the shape of Jesus **FOR (justification)**, **IN (sanctification)**, and **THROUGH (vocation)** us. Trusting Christ in all things and living from Word and Sacrament, we grow out of Jesus **FOR** us and **IN** us—the received, sustaining work of grace. Loving neighbor and bearing witness are Jesus **THROUGH** us—grace overflowing into love and mission. Daily repentance is the thread that runs through all three, returning us again and again to the **FOR-us** grace that starts the cycle all over. Over the next five sessions, we will take up each of these characteristics in turn, asking not just what it looks like but how it grows out of who Jesus is **FOR** us, **IN** us, and **THROUGH** us.

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-2).

“I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained” (Philippians 3:13-16).

“Confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6)

Complete and Discuss:

1. Individually, silently complete three times the following sentence stem. Each time, your response should be at least a little different from before.

A Christian is...

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. Share and discuss your responses. Note similarities and differences. Try to reach a consensus on three new or revised sentence completions. (**Note:** There is no definitively right response that would fully encompass what a Christian is or isn't. Your/our responses are more descriptive than they are fully definitive.)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

3. Which of the five characteristics is easiest for you?
4. Which one is hardest?
5. Which one do you hope God develops most in you through this study and/or this year?
6. Knowing Jesus is **FOR** you...that Jesus is **IN** you...that Jesus is moving **THROUGH** you, choose one of the following:
 - a. Knowing Jesus is **FOR** me frees me from or frees me to _____
 - b. Knowing Jesus is **IN** me, a habit the Spirit is nudging me to break or to form is _____
 - c. Knowing Jesus moves **THROUGH** me, one way I will serve this week is _____

Session Two

Trusting in Christ in all things (Jesus FOR)

1. Choose One and Share:

- "In what do you instinctively trust when life begins falling apart?" or
- "Where do you turn first when you receive frightening news?"

Christ is both the cornerstone and the capstone of the Christian life. We begin with Him, grow through Him, and end in Him. As the cornerstone, He is the one upon whom everything Christian is built. As the capstone, He is the one who holds everything together. Without Jesus FOR us, there is no Christianity.

While there are rules, commands, and guidelines for Christian living, Christianity is not about a list of rules for moral and ethical living. Christianity is about a God who is FOR us in ALL things. As we mature in Christ, the Jesus who is FOR us subsequently becomes Jesus IN us and Jesus THROUGH us. Christianity is *Christian* because Christ is in it every step and teaching of the way.

Who do you say that I am?

The central or pivotal questions in each of the Synoptic Gospels are the same.

"Who do people say that I am?" (Matthew 16:13; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18)

"Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20)

2. The questions, "Who do people say Jesus is [or who do people acknowledge as their god]?" and "Who do you say Jesus is?" as well as being the pivotal questions of the Synoptics, are also the pivotal questions today. Who are the gods of today's societies and cultures?

- "Who do people today say Jesus is?" "What do they say/believe about Jesus?"
Who/what do people today ultimately trust in for their happiness and well-being?

Our "God/god" can be defined as that in whom or what we ultimately trust for our present and eternal happiness and well-being. When someone or something becomes a "god" for us, it commands allegiance and obedience because we trust it with our lives and our destiny. The Serpent in Genesis 3 tempts Adam and Eve with the god of the knowledge of good and evil through which they could become a god unto themselves.

Who Do You Trust???

3. For people in the USA today, identify what you believe are the three primary objects of people's trust (things they are most inclined to attend to and follow because they believe it is best suited to provide them with what they want and need)? Mark your top three choices with an "S" = society.

___ Jesus (Yahweh)
___ the god of some organized non-Christian religion (e.g., Hinduism, Islam)
___ personal wealth
___ family
___ job
___ health
___ science
___ knowledge in general
___ personal piety/ethics/morality
___ one's personal contribution to society and the well-being of others
___ other _____

4. Using the same list, using the letter "P" = personal, mark the three things in which you most trust for your happiness and well-being. For YOU, which of these promise you the greatest security? Explain.

In answer to the first of Jesus' two questions, His disciples replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14).

5. In what people were saying, what were they correctly recognizing and what were they missing?

In answer to Jesus' second question, Peter responds, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). On the surface, this sounds like a great answer, that Peter understands. In fact, Jesus affirms Peter's answer in Matthew 16:17-19. However, Peter quickly demonstrates that although he had said the right words, he did not understand what he had confessed. In Matthew 16:21, Jesus tells His disciples that this Christ Peter had just confessed Jesus to be was going to suffer and die, at which point Peter strongly objects, stating, "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22). Jesus, at this point, reprimands Peter, stating, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23).

- When Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, what do you think he was thinking/believing? In what was he placing his trust?
- Peter's confession was technically, verbally correct. Yet, it was incorrect, tainted by "the things of men." How had the mind/thinking of humankind tainted Peter's thinking?
- When and how are people today tempted to misunderstand and misrepresent Jesus?

"Jesus' glory, especially as it is portrayed in John's Gospel (John 12:23-33), is best seen and understood through the lens of Good Friday rather than Easter Sunday. Good Friday shows us the depth of Jesus' love FOR us; Easter Sunday shows us the extent of Jesus' power. They

are both important and incomplete without the other. But if it were not for Jesus' love (Good Friday), Jesus' power would not cause us to glorify Him, but to cower in terror." – Bill Cullen

6. What part of the above quote challenges your understanding of Jesus? ...Good Friday?
...Easter?

"Where do you see Good Friday misunderstood or underappreciated in American Christianity?"

In John's Gospel, Jesus will answer His own Synoptic Gospels question.

"I am the bread of life" (John 6:35).

"I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

"I am the gate" (John 10:7).

"I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

"I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

"I am the true vine" (John 15:1).

John's Gospel further tells us,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made....¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1,3,14)

- As you think of Jesus being FOR us/you, which of the additional John verses listed above is most meaningful for you at this time?

**(If, or as time allows, continue with question seven;
if time prohibits, go directly to question eight.)**

Regarding Jesus' purpose, Scripture tells us

7. From the following passages, choose one that is meaningful for you at this time. Explain.

___ *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).*

___ *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).*

___ *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).*

___ *"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20).*

___ *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee*

should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” **(Philippians 2:5-11)**.

___ “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” **(Romans 8:31-32)**.

___ “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men” **(1 Timothy 2:5-6)**.

___ “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” **(Hebrews 2:14-17)**.

___ “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” **(Hebrews 4:14-16)**.

___ “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” **(Hebrews 9:28)**.

___ “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” **(Hebrews 10:10)**.

___ “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” **(Hebrews 12:2)**.

___ “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” **(1 John 2:2)**.

___ “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” **(1 John 3:16)**.

___ “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” **(1 John 4:8-10)**.

8. What does knowing that “Jesus has your back both now and eternally” free you from? What does it free you for?

- Knowing that Jesus is **FOR** you, identify one specific step of faith you will take this week?

Session Three

Living from God's Word and Sacraments. (Jesus IN)

(Depending upon your group, leaders may want to divide this lesson into two lessons.)

(Note: The written text of the Bible passages cited in this study guide can be found at the end of this session. They are all taken from the NIV translation and are listed in the order they are found in the Bible, not in the order they appear in the study guide. Some texts are referenced more than once in the study guide.)

Jesus living and growing in us is exciting and transforming.

JESUS IS LIVING AND GROWING IN YOU!!!

John 15:4-5 *“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”*

1. Identify a person you know in and through whom you consistently see and experience Jesus and His presence.
 - Describe this person and what makes him or her different from many people you know.
 - What do you find most attractive about this person?

Jesus lives in us through the Holy Spirit, who comes to us through the Gospel, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and God's Word. As He dwells in us, He forgives, strengthens, transforms, and produces His fruit. Christian growth is therefore not self-improvement but Christ, through His Spirit, continuing His work within us.

2. Discuss the seven Biblical truths below.
 - How does each relate to Jesus IN us? What questions, if any, do they raise for you?
 - How, if at all, do the accompanying Bible passages add to your insights and/or your questions?

Biblical Truths:

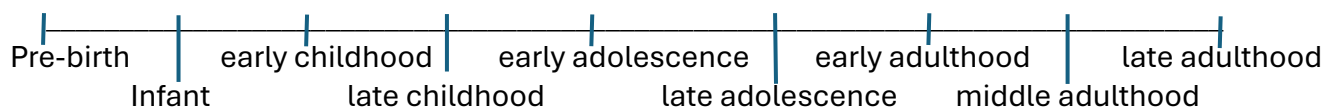
- 1) When faith is birthed in us through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are spiritually born again and are Christian (John 3:3-6; Galatians 3:27).
- 2) Just as a newborn baby is 100% human, so are Christians, regardless of maturity, 100% Christian, justified, and redeemed (Romans 6:10; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:1-2).
- 3) Just as a baby upon birth has little control over its body parts and functions, so do spiritually immature Christians tend to have little control over their spiritual lives and faith journey (1 Corinthians 13:10-12; Ephesians 4:13-14).
- 4) Christians, just as babies, children, and for that matter, adults, need to be cared for and nurtured if they are to mature as fully functioning citizens of the Kingdom of God (Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 2:6-7; Hebrews 10:22-25).

- 5) Jesus desires to grow in and mature each and every Christian throughout their life (Philippians 1:6; Philippians 3:12-16; Hebrews 5:14-6:2).
- 6) The goal of Christian maturity is: As one matures in Christ, one is increasingly transformed into Christlikeness and increasingly bears the fruit of His indwelling presence (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 4:19; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:27-29; 1 John 3:2).
- 7) The Spirit's primary tools both in birthing Christian faith, and in nurturing/maturing Christians are Word, Sacrament, and Christian fellowship (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 10:22-25).
3. As a group, take a short moment to describe/characterize a Christian at each of the following stages of *Spiritual* maturity: (for each stage, come up with two to five descriptors)

Special Note: No stage is inherently good or bad. A stage is simply the current condition a person is in. A stage will impact how a person sees and relates to the world, to others, and to God. People are created and designed to progress through the various stages. Some people will spend more time in a particular stage than others. One of our responsibilities as members of Christ's Body, the church, is to aid people in progressing through the stages.

- (a) spiritual infant _____
- (b) spiritual child _____
- (c) spiritual adolescence _____
- (d) spiritual young adult _____
- (e) spiritual laborer _____
- (f) spiritual parent/mentor _____

4. "Where do you believe God is presently growing you on this journey?" Explain why you placed yourself there.



This exercise is intended for *self-reflection, not comparison*. Spiritual maturity is measured less by how much one knows than by increasing trust in Christ, repentance, humility, love, and faithful dependence upon God's Means of Grace.

5. Martin Luther had a ritual for remembering his baptism. He would make the sign of the cross over his forehead and his chest, repeating the words "I am a beloved child." In doing so, he both remembered that in baptism God had claimed him as His (God's) own, and that in baptism he (Luther) daily died (drowned in the water of baptism (Romans 6:3-4), and daily rose as a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

- If baptized, talk about what your baptism means to you. How often do you remember it?
6. Taking advantage of the Holy Spirit's tools of: a) Scripture, b) public worship, c) the Lord's Supper, d) remembering your Baptism, e) Christian fellowship, f) confession and repentance/turning to God, and g) prayer (focused on listening to God), what will you do this week that your spirit might be nurtured? (Focus on one tool; when it becomes a regular part of your spiritual development, choose another tool and focus on it.)
- FOR THOSE UP TO A BIGGER STRETCH: Develop a three-month renewable spiritual maturity growth plan. Review it regularly and revise it as you deem helpful. (Suggest you enlist an accountability partner.)

While there may be growth spurts, spiritual growth tends to be gradual. The Spirit ordinarily, using His Means of Grace, persistently shapes people over years (Philippians 1:6; 1 John 3:1-2).

Psalms 19:7-11 "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. ¹⁰They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. ¹¹By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

Psalms 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

John 1:1-4,14 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men.... ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 3:3-6 "Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' ⁴'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' ⁵Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'"

John 15:4-5 "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

John 20:31 "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

Romans 6:3-4 "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in

order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Romans 10:17 “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

Romans 12:1-2 “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

1 Corinthians 13:10-11 “When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

2 Corinthians 3:18 “We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 “¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

2 Corinthians 5:19-20 “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 3:27 “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Galatians 4:19 “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”

Galatians 5:22-23 “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.”

Ephesians 1:22-23 “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Ephesians 4:1 “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”

Ephesians 4:11-16 “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves,

and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Philippians 1:6 “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 3:12-16 “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.”

Colossians 1:27-29 “God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”

Colossians 2:6-7 “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

1 Thessalonians 2:13 “We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”

2 Timothy 2:14-15 “Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

2 Timothy 3:15-17 “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 4:2 “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.”

Titus 1:3 “At his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.”

Titus 3:4-8 “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

Hebrews 1:1-3 “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 5:13-6:2 “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. ^{6:1} Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”

Hebrews 10:22-25 “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.”

2 Peter 1:3-4 “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

1 John 1:1 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.”

1 John 2:2 “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

1 John 3:1-2 “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Session Four

Loving neighbor in concrete ways. (Jesus THROUGH)

1. Comment on the statement: "In love, one learns more about the one who loves than one learns about the beloved." – Bill Cullen

- What does God's love tell us about God? ...about us?

A Christian life begins with God/Jesus' love *FOR* us. Jesus' sacrificial, atoning love *FOR* us makes us right with God. We are justified. A catchy phrase is justified means "just-if-I-'ed never sinned." Our justification is solely dependent on Jesus' work and merit, not our own.

Having been justified through Jesus' atoning sacrifice (Romans 3:24-25; 1 John 2:2), the Holy Spirit, using such means as Word and Sacrament, seeks to form in us the Christ He has birthed *IN* us (Galatians 4:19). As Christ is increasingly formed *IN* us, His presence and character does what Jesus by nature does, He bears the fruit of His indwelling presence *THROUGH* us (John 15:4-5; Galatians 5:22-23).

"This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is truly active through love (Gal. 5:6), that is, it finds expression in works of freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward; and for himself he is satisfied with the fullness and wealth of his faith." – ***Treatise on Christian Liberty, Martin Luther***

"...the Apostle has prescribed this rule for the life of Christians, namely, that we should devote all our works to the welfare of others, since each has such abundant riches in his faith that all his other works and his whole life are a surplus with which he can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor." – ***Treatise on Christian Liberty, Martin Luther***

Philippians 2:12-13 "work out your salvation... ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

2. How is "work out" different from "work for"? ("Work out" implies we already have it)?
3. What enables the "working out" of our salvation (note v. 13)?

Faith does not create. Faith receives. Faith and the subsequent good works are stimulated responses to the presence and abundance of grace in our lives, communicated and bestowed upon us through God's Means of Grace (Word and Sacrament).

4. Read **Ephesians 1:3-10** responsively by verse.

Leader: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Side 1: "4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

Side 2: "In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—"

All: "6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."

Side 1: “⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”

Side 2: “⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”

Leader: “⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,”

All: “¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”

(Note the word “every” in v. 3 and the word “lavished” in v. 8).

John 15:4-5 “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.”

5. Discuss the statement: “All Christian response-ability begins with God. God gives ability. Without God giving ability, a person has no ability with which to make a response, hence no response-ability, but with every blessing comes response-ability.” – Bill Cullen

1 Corinthians 12:7 “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

Matthew 10:8 “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

Galatians 6:2,9-10 “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.... ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰ Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people.”

John 15:8,16-17 ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples....¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit....¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.”

1 Peter 4:10 “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”

- What response-ability accompanies living a Christian (Christ-like) life? What is God’s role in living a Christ-like life? What is our role?
6. There is a good analogy which makes use of the two seas in Israel. In northern Israel is the Sea of Galilee, and in southern Israel is the Dead Sea. These two seas are 63 miles apart from each other, but both are fed by the Jordan River. The Sea of Galilee is full of fish, with life and vegetation in and around it. It is enjoyed by residents and by tourists. The Dead Sea is the opposite—no life, no fish, no vegetation. The surrounding area is desert-like. The difference is that while the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee, it flows out again, along with the minerals and salt deposits within it. The Dead Sea has no outlet through which the minerals and salt might flow. God’s blessings are meant to pass through us, finding blessing in the lives of others. If God’s

blessings don't have an outlet in our lives, we become putrid and end up stinking up the place (think of the story of Scrooge in A Christmas Carol).

God's intent is that we be like the Sea of Galilee. God delights in blessing His children for their/our joy. He also delights to bless others THROUGH them/us.

- Which blessings from God tend to stop with you rather than flow through you? Why?
- As a group, brainstorm and list ways that God has blessed your faith community (this may be your congregation or simply your small group). Catalog them as

<u>Spiritual blessings</u>	<u>Material & Financial Blessings</u>	<u>Talents</u>	<u>Misc./Other</u>

- How is our faith community enjoying and benefiting from each of the above-listed blessings?
- How is the general community and/or individual outside our faith community enjoying and benefiting from each of the above-listed blessings?
- What unrealized opportunities are there for our faith community to benefit?
- What unrealized opportunities are there for people outside our faith community to benefit?

God ordinarily loves people through people. He feeds through farmers, heals through physicians, teaches through parents and teachers, protects through governing authorities, encourages through Christian friends, and proclaims the Gospel through His Church (of which all Christians are members). Christian vocation is God's ordinary way of caring for His creation.

- As a group, identify one new way you can use one of the blessings/abilities God has given you to bless a group or person outside our faith community.

7. Bringing it home—getting personal

- How has God blessed you personally: spiritually, materially, with talents, other?

<u>Spiritual blessings</u>	<u>Material & Financial Blessings</u>	<u>Talents</u>	<u>Misc./Other</u>

- How are you personally benefiting from God's blessings?
- How are you using God's blessings to bless others?
- What opportunities do you have to bless others?

In **Ephesians 4:1**, Paul instructs us to live lives "worthy of our calling." Luther and the Reformers, in their understanding of the "priesthood of all believers" (**1 Peter 2:9**), understand our calling (vocation) is comprised of *our everyday daily lives and relationships*, in and through which we bear witness to

God and His loving presence among us. In **Ephesians 4:2**, Paul begins to describe what “a life worthy of our calling” looks like. He writes, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Jesus in **John 15:16** tells us He has chosen (called) us to bear fruit. Then in **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul tells us the fruit of the Spirit consists of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

- Considering where God has already placed you, choose one of the blessings/abilities God has given you. How can you live a life worthy of your calling to bear fruit and to bless someone in some new way this week?

Leader: *We go now.*

Group: *Knowing Jesus For you, Jesus In you, Jesus Through you!*

All: *Thanks be to God!*

Bonus Passages & Quotes

Note to the Leader: Before your group gets together, read over all the passages listed below. Think about where and how during your group time, you might make use of the one(s) that particularly strike you or that you particularly like.

Matthew 25:35-40 “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ ³⁷“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ⁴⁰“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Romans 12:1,9-18,21 “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship....⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.... ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13 “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails.... ¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Galatians 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Ephesians 2:8-10 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Colossians 3:12-14 “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 “Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.”

2 Timothy 3:15-17 “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

James 2:16-17 “If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

James 4:17 “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”

1 John 3:16-18 “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”

The following quotes are all taken from Martin Luther’s *Treatise on Christian Liberty*.

“I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.”

“Behold, from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one’s neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss. For a man does not serve that he may put men under obligations. He does not distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or unthankfulness, but he most freely and most willingly spends himself and all that he has, whether he wastes all on the thankless or whether he gains a reward.”

“We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.”

“Our faith in Christ does not free us from works, but from false opinions concerning works, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works. Faith redeems, corrects, and preserves our consciences so that we know that righteousness does not consist in works, although works neither can nor ought to be wanting.”

Session Five

Bearing witness to Christ naturally and humbly. (Jesus THROUGH)

1. What sets a wedding ring apart? What does it do for the wearer? ...for observers?

The word “holy” (in Hebrew is qadosh – קדוש – in Greek it is hagios – ἅγιος) literally means to be “set apart.” A Christian is to be “holy,” to be “set apart,” not so much set apart from, but set apart for, set apart to give witness to Christ through both our words and our deeds. It is from the word holy that we get the words: sacred, consecrated, saint, sacrament. While being set apart for the purposes of God will result in outward behaviors, it is not outward behaviors that make a person holy. God makes people holy as He calls/sets them apart for His purposes.

In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham and his descendants (sets them apart) to be a blessing to the nations by giving witness to God and by being the ancestors of Jesus the Christ.

Genesis 12:3 “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

In Exodus, God tells Moses the Israelites to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” In 1 Peter, God says the same thing of all Christian people.

Exodus 19:6 “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

1 Peter 2:9 “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

2. To what extent do you see yourself as “holy,” a person called and set apart by God for His purposes?

Holiness doesn’t begin with us. It begins with **Jesus FOR us**, followed by **Jesus IN us**. It begins by God calling us, God blessing us, and God gifting (enabling) us for a faith response demonstrated in our attitude, our words, and our behaviors. Isaiah says of the Jews that they are to be a “light for the Gentiles.” Jesus says the same of His followers.

Isaiah 42:6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.”

Isaiah 49:6 “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Matthew 5:16 “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

We are “holy,” set apart by God, to make Him known in and to a world in desperate need of Him. Above all, what the world needs to know is that God is love, and Jesus is God’s love incarnate.

John 1:1,14,18 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth....¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

1 John 4:8-10 “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live

through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

We let our light shine and make God known best by loving others as He loves us.

John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

1 John 3:16 “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”

Romans 5:7-8 “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

1 Corinthians 16:14 “Do everything in love.”

3. Where and how are you seeing, hearing, and experiencing a world in need of Jesus and His forgiving and restorative love (the more specific you are, the better)?

Matthew 9:10-13 “While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?’ ¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

Romans 3:23-24 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

In my undergraduate studies at Concordia Senior College in Fort Wayne, Indiana, one of my professors, Dr. Wentz, was fond of saying, “It may be true that deeds speak louder than words, but the greatest deed is speaking the Word of life.”

4. What is your understanding of the Word of life? How important is it to you to share this Word with others, particularly with your non-Christian friends and relatives?

Mark 5:19 “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

John 14:6 “Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 20:31 “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Romans 10:14-15,17 “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”....¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

1 Peter 3:15 “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

1 John 1:1-3 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we

proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”

5. As they give witness, what are two or three passages below you think many Christians tend to forget? What are two or three you personally want to be sure to remember?

___ **John 3:16-17** “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

___ **John 15:16-17** “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last....¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.”

___ **Acts 1:8** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

___ **Acts 4:12** “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

___ **Romans 12:3** “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.”

___ **Ephesians 2:8-9** “By grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”

___ **Ephesians 4:32** “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

___ **Colossians 4:5-6** “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

___ **1 Timothy 2:3-6** “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men.”

___ **2 Timothy 1:7** For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”

___ **James 1:19** “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

___ **1 John 1:8-10** “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

6. What are two or three fears that tend to keep Christians from witnessing? What could quiet those fears?
7. Think of two non-Christian friends with whom you will share Jesus’ love this week.
- With one, identify an act of service you can perform to share Jesus’ love.
 - With the second, identify what you would like to verbally communicate about Jesus and His love. This may be done face-to-face, via a letter, an email, a text, a card, or a phone call.

Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Close by saying together: **“In God’s grace, we go to share God’s grace.”**

Session Six

Daily repenting, returning to Christ for forgiveness and hope

1. **What** comes to mind when you hear the word “repent” or “repentance”? In the word “repent,” do you hear a command or an invitation? Explain.
2. Recall the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The younger son, recognizing his self-destructive state, trusting in his father’s goodness (even if initially not in his forgiveness), repented, changed direction, and went home. The father is anxiously waiting for his son’s return, and he lavishly receives his son back without explanation, restitution, or conditions.

Metanoia – μετάνοια – is one of my favorite Greek words. In English it is translated as repent. John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) both begin their public ministry with the call to repent. Repent basically means to change direction.

Matthew 3:1-2 “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ² and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”

Matthew 4:17 “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”

Martin Luther, in the first of his famous 95 Theses, stated: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent,’ He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Many people understand repentance to be a change of behavior, as leaving a life of sin. However, I see the change of behavior (letting go of sinful habits) as the *“fruit of repentance”* (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8). Christian repentance, as I understand it, is a turning to God. The change is a change in whom or what we place our trust. In repentance we turn to and place our trust in Jesus and His Kingdom. While “Repent” certainly has an element of command, for me it is God’s gracious invitation to return to Christ and the blessings of the Kingdom. The Baptist and Jesus invited people to turn to God with the Gospel promise of a Kingdom of Love where they would experience grace and forgiveness.

Even the turning is initiated by God through the magnetic pull of the Gospel promise, a King and Kingdom of love. The Gospel promise draws people to the Kingdom with Jesus as King. As we are drawn to Jesus and the Kingdom, we are simultaneously being drawn away from our former trusts and behavioral patterns. We are drawn to a new way of living, a better way, Jesus’ way. The power motivating and moving the turning rests in the magnetic pull of the Gospel—what Jesus has done and does FOR us, IN us, and THROUGH us. ***The attraction and power for repentance is a Kingdom where Jesus in love reigns/governs as King.***

Matthew 6:10 “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Matthew 6:33 “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Luke 17:20-21 “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, ²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’”

Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Romans 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

2 Thessalonians 2:14 “He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. Discuss your thoughts and reaction to what the author suggests:

- (1) the call to repent is more of an invitation than it is a command,
- (2) the power motivating and moving repentance is the Gospel message (a Kingdom where Jesus reigns in love,
- (3) the Gospel serves like a magnet, drawing people to itself, to Jesus,
- (4) changes in behavior are the “fruit of repentance.”

Rather than trusting in God, His love, and His forgiveness, many religious leaders of Jesus’ day were trusting in: (1) their ancestral heritage as descendants of Abraham, and (2) the Law of Moses.

Matthew 3:9 “And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”

Romans 10:2-4 “For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

We live in a fallen world. We are daily bombarded with many people and many things making us promises, seeking our trust and loyalty. This isn’t bad itself (e.g., spouses promise each other their love, trust, and loyalty, parents and children, law enforcement, employers/employees, friends, etc.). However, when someone or something begins to compete with God for our trust and/or loyalty, it becomes bad and leads to sin. Satan knows full well our weak trust spots, and sadly he makes many faulty promises that fall upon receptive ears. *Thus, we daily sin much. We daily trust in things other than Christ (perhaps not for eternal salvation, but for the moment), and we need to confess.*

4. In what things, other than Jesus, are people today in the USA tempted to put their trust in?

- What about you, what are things, at least for the moment, that compete with God for your trust and loyalty? In what faulty promises are you tempted to trust? What lies are you most tempted to believe over the ways of Jesus?

Romans 3:23 “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

1 John 1:8 “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

In the Kingdom of God, for those who turn to Christ, sin is not ultimately met with condemnation but with forgiveness, restoration, and hope (think again of the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 2:1-2 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Romans 3:3-4 “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? ⁴ Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar.”

God has entrusted His church with the keys of the kingdom.

Matthew 16:19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

John 20:23 “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

In public worship, the pastor exercises the “Office of the Keys” in sharing words of absolution (forgiveness) and in sharing the Sacraments (particularly the regular sharing of the Sacrament of the Altar: “This is My Body given for you...” “This is My Blood shed for you...”). In Lutheran and Catholic theology, in the Sacrament of the Altar, Jesus, using bread and wine, shares with us His body and blood (Catholic—transubstantiation; Lutheran—Sacramental union or “real presence,” the body and blood present “in, with, and under” the bread and wine) to give us physical evidence that our sins are forgiven, as His body and blood were not given and shed needlessly. In personal relationships, every Christian has the ability and response-ability to share the assurance of God’s forgiveness with any and all who would turn to God for it. We also have the response-ability to warn those who do not turn to God that they are forfeiting the forgiveness God desperately desires to provide them.

5. For you personally, how meaningful are the times of confession and absolution in public worship? What, if anything, would make them more meaningful?
 - For you, how meaningful is receiving the Sacrament of the Altar (the Lord’s Supper)? What could make it more meaningful?
6. What are your thoughts, feelings, and comfort level in your personal response-ability to share words of absolution (forgiveness) to people seeking it, and/or words of warning to the unrepentant (people who do not turn to God)? What would increase your comfort level?
7. What do you want to remember and focus upon the next time you participate in public worship and experience corporate confession and absolution?
 - What do you want to remember and focus upon the next time you celebrate the Lord’s Supper?
8. Do you know someone needing to be assured of God’s love and forgiveness? How might you assure them? (This may be done face-to-face, email, letter, card, or whatever.)

Closing
(Say together in unison)

Jesus, thank You!
Thank You for Your forgiveness.
Thank You for making us new.
Thank You for empowering us.
Use us now as Your ambassadors of reconciliation!

Session Seven

Pulling It All Together

In this final session of this Bible study series, we want to circle back and review what Jesus in His Word has been trying to teach us.

1. Looking back over the past seven weeks, what conversation, Scripture, insight, or moment most changed (or affirmed) your understanding of what it means to be a Christian?
2. In the first session, we were asked to complete the sentence stem three times: “A Christian is....” I now ask you to do so again.

A Christian is...

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

- How does your response compare to how you/we answered in the first lesson?

3. Many people, both Christian and non-Christian, believe the goal of Christianity is eternal salvation. Would/do you agree or disagree? Explain.

I would suggest that eternal salvation is NOT the goal; rather, it is the starting point.

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

Christians have salvation the moment they have been “born again,” that is, the moment they, through faith, know Jesus FOR them as their Savior. Just as a newborn person is fully human, a newborn Christian, regardless of their age, is fully Christian and has eternal life.

I would suggest that God’s goal, Christianity’s goal, is twofold: (1) to reach with the Gospel those who have not yet been born again, are not yet Christian, and (2) for those knowing Jesus, to grow/mature in our love/trust relationship with Yahweh (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and grow as citizens of the Kingdom by maturing them/us in Christlikeness. Word and Sacrament, and daily repentance (returning to God) are the chief means God provides and uses to accomplish both purposes.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

2 Corinthians 3:18 “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

Galatians 4:19 “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you....”

Colossians 1:27-29 “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and

teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.”

1 John 3:1-2 “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!... ²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

1 John 4:7-8 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

- Why might eternal salvation be a starting point rather than a goal? How does this root us in Jesus FOR us?
- What assurance does this provide Christians throughout their faith journey on earth?
- How does this become the soil that is liberating for Jesus IN us and Jesus THROUGH us?

(If under time constraints, leaders may want to invite each person to choose 2-3 of the five prompts below.)

Complete the following:

4. **Jesus FOR me** means _____
It is comforting _____
It is challenging _____
5. **Jesus IN me** means _____
It is comforting _____
It is challenging _____
6. **Jesus THROUGH me** means _____
It is comforting _____
It is challenging _____
7. **Repentance** to me means _____
It is comforting _____
It is challenging _____
8. **Means of Grace** for me are _____
It is comforting _____
It is challenging _____
9. In light of our seven weeks together, one new habit I want to form is _____
 - I will enlist an accountability partner (if you can name the person now, do so) _____

(It is suggested that accountability partners establish a weekly check-in time (remember if/when you stumble, God’s solution is simple: Repent (turn back to Jesus FOR you, IN you, THROUGH you).)

10. If every member of our congregation embraced these five characteristics, how would our congregation be different?
11. One year from now, what do you hope God will be doing IN your life? ...THROUGH your life?

Closing Litany

Leader: Jesus is FOR us!

Side One: We are fully forgiven.

Side Two: We are fully restored.

All: We are His beloved, now and forever!

Leader: Jesus is IN us!

Side One: He is being increasingly formed in us.

Side Two: Transforming us into His image.

All: We are now, yet ever becoming.

Leader: Jesus is THROUGH us!

Side One: We are the Church

Side Two: Jesus' Body and presence in the world.

All: Seeking the lost, caring for those in need, whatever the need.

Leader: We REPENT!

Side One: Confident of His love

Side Two: We daily turn and return to Jesus.

All: We rejoice in His forgiveness and renewal.

Leader: God SPEAKS!

Side One: Through Means of Grace

Side Two: Word and Sacrament

All: Thank You, Yahweh, Blessed Trinity!

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for planning our salvation!

Thank You, Jesus, for accomplishing our salvation!

Thank You, Holy Spirit, for delivering and growing that salvation through Word and Sacrament.

Your Group may want to close with a song, perhaps

Great Is the Lord

Great is the Lord, He is holy and just, by His power we trust in His love.

Great is the Lord, He is faithful and true, by His mercy He proves He is love.

Great is the Lord and worthy of glory! Great is the Lord and worthy of praise!

Great is the Lord, now lift up your voice, now lift up your voice,
now lift up your voice to God and sing great is the Lord.

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