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Introduction

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

Welcome to the conversation! The Bible study resources you are using are created to support the bold vision of the Book of Faith initiative that calls “the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.”

Simply put, this initiative and these resources invite you to “Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.”

We enter into this conversation based on the promise that exploring the Bible deeply with others opens us to God working in and through us. God’s Word is life changing, church changing, and world changing. Lutheran approaches to Scripture provide a fruitful foundation for connecting Bible, life, and faith.

A Session Overview

Each session is divided into the following four key sections. The amount of time spent in each section may vary based on choices you make. The core Learner Session Guide is designed for 50 minutes. A session can be expanded to as much as 90 minutes by using the Bonus Activities that appear in the Leader Session Guide.

• Gather (10-15 minutes)

Time to check in, make introductions, review homework assignments, share an opening prayer, and use the Focus Activity to introduce learners to the Session Focus.

• Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

The session Scripture text is read using a variety of methods and activities. Learners are asked to respond to a few general questions. As leader, you may want to capture initial thoughts or questions on paper for later review.

• Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Learners explore the session Scripture text through core questions and activities that cover each of the four perspectives (see diagram on p. 6). The core Learner Session Guide material may be expanded through use of the Bonus Activities provided in the Leader Session Guide. Each session ends with a brief Wrap-Up and prayer.

• Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Lists homework assignments, including next week’s session Scripture text. The leader may choose one or more items to assign for all. Each session also includes additional Enrichment options and may include For Further Reading suggestions.

A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

- To increase biblical fluency;
- To encourage and facilitate informed small group conversation based on God’s Word; and
- To renew and empower us to carry out God’s mission for the sake of the world.

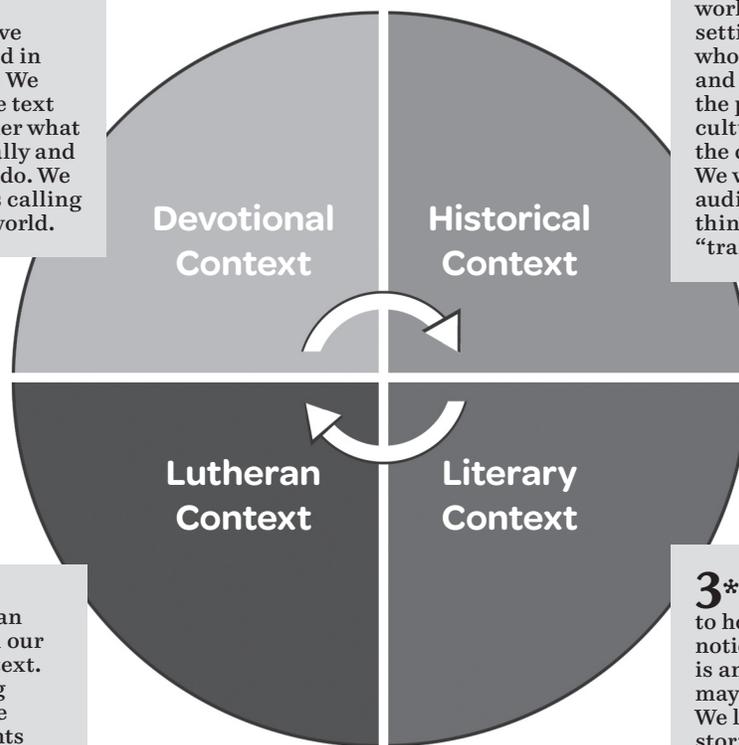
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience with the text.

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-orientated Bible conversations. The resources call for prepared leaders to facilitate learner discovery, discussion, and activity. Active learning and frequent engagement with Scripture will lead to greater biblical fluency and encourage active faith.

1 We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

5 We return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.

2* We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.



4 We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

3* We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

*** Sessions may begin with either Historical Context or Literary Context.**

The diagram on p. 6 summarizes the general way this method is intended to work. A more detailed introduction to the method used in Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies is available in *Opening the Book of Faith* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

The Learner Session Guide

The Learner Session Guide content is built on the four sections (see p. 5). The content included in the main “Join the Conversation” section is considered to be the core material needed to explore the session Scripture text. Each session includes a Focus Image that is used as part of an activity or question somewhere within the core session. Other visuals (maps, charts, photographs, and illustrations) may be included to help enhance the learner’s experience with the text and its key concepts.

The Leader Session Guide

For easy reference, the Leader Session Guide contains all the content included in the Learner Session Guide and more. The elements that are unique to the Leader Session Guide are the following:

- **Before You Begin**—Helpful tips to use as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Session Overview**—Contains detailed description of key themes and content covered in each of the four contexts (Historical, Literary, Lutheran, Devotional). Core questions and activities in the Learner Session Guide are intended to emerge directly from this Session Overview. Highlighted parts of the Session Overview provide a kind of “quick prep” for those wanting to do an initial scan of the key session themes and content.
- **Key Definitions**—Key terms or concepts that appear in the Session Overview may be illustrated or defined.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—To help the leader center on the session theme and leadership task.
- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.

- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

Session Prep Video

(Available on the DVD that accompanies this unit.) To help you prepare to lead the session, Session Prep Video segments have been created. A guide will walk with you through a session overview and the key parts of the session flow. These segments can provide helpful hints, but they are not meant to replace your own deeper preparation.

Leader and Learner

In Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the leader’s primary task is facilitating small group conversation and activity. These conversations are built around structured learning tasks. What is a structured learning task? It is an open question or activity that engages learners with new content and the resources they need to respond. Underlying this structured dialog approach are three primary assumptions about adult learners:

- Adult learners bring with them varied experiences and the capability to do active learning tasks;
- Adult learners learn best when they are invited to be actively involved in learning; and
- Adults are more accountable and engaged when active learning tasks are used.

Simply put, the goal is fluency in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. How does one become fluent in a new language, proficient in building houses, or skilled at hitting a baseball? By practicing and doing in a hands-on way. Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies provides the kind of hands-on Bible exploration that will produce Bible-fluent learners equipped to do God’s work in the world.

Books of Faith Series

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies includes several series and courses. This Galatians unit is part of the

Books of Faith Series, which is designed to explore key themes and texts in the books of the Bible. Each book of the Bible reveals a unique story or message of faith. Many core themes, story lines, and characters are shared by several books, but each book in its own right is a book of faith. Exploring these books of faith in depth opens us to the variety and richness of God’s written word for us.

Galatians Unit Overview

This study of Galatians could have been titled, “How to meet God, transcend religion, and live in grace and power forever.” Paul’s letter to the Galatians is the most radical book in the New Testament. It is Paul at his most youthful, least understated, and most non-compromising. The purpose of the letter is to defend, with clear and biting prose, the conversion of his precious little Gentile house churches in Galatia from all enemies, foreign and domestic. This letter was written in the face of a real threat from those in high and low places in the church—the idea that the Gentiles had to, more or less, follow Jewish religious rites to become true followers of Christ. Paul decides that this is a hill worth dying on, and lets his enemies have it with both barrels. Out of fire comes gold; Galatians may be the clearest confession of the Christian faith ever penned by a human.

This four-session course explores Galatians through four key questions:

Session 1 (Galatians 1:1-24) asks, What’s at stake when we focus on people-pleasing? In this session we will get familiar with the basic historical situation in which Galatians was written so that we can better appreciate the letter. We will also start to examine how we deal with all the

expectations that individuals and institutions have of us, and how we can never meet them all. We will start to see God’s solution to this most human of problems.

Session 2 (Galatians 2:1-21) asks, Can there be more than one gospel? There are many religions and denominations, but can there be more than one gospel, more than one “good news” from a God who loves us? We explore in this session the Apostolic Council, the word *gospel*, and what it means to be saved from our efforts and to experience true grace.

Session 3 (Galatians 3:6-29; 5:18) asks, Why did God send the law? What do we do with it now? The Bible is full of expectations that God has of us. If Christ frees us of this law, then what do we do with all the rules, including the Ten Commandments? Are we still obligated to follow them? In this session, Paul urges us to leave behind the “guardian” of the law and focus on something else (see next session)!

Session 4 (Galatians 3:1-5; 5:1-26, 6:8-10) asks, What would it take to turn your spirituality upside down? If, as we learned, in Session 3, we are no longer obligated to follow the law, what is left over? Paul shows us that the remaining two choices are “the flesh” and “the Spirit.” Life in the Spirit is the key to transformation and Christian lifestyle. We will explore during this session what it means to live by the Holy Spirit. How can this transform our relationship with God and with one another?

Galatians 1:1-24

Leader Session Guide

Focus Statement

The radical good news of the gospel offers an exciting alternative to the trap of people pleasing.

Key Verse

Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.
Galatians 1:10

Focus Image



Dog Rose thorns. Buckinghamshire, UK © age fotostock / SuperStock

What Happens to People Pleasers?

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

Many of us assume that loving people equals going out of our way to please them. In fact, Christians often *overshoot* people pleasing and end up codependent. How comfortable are you with people being uncomfortable with you? Has being a “church person” kept you, ironically, from hearing the voice of God because you try to meet everyone’s expectations? Think about these things as you explore Paul’s words in Galatians 1.

Session instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video.
2. Read this Session Leader Guide completely. Note especially the highlighted portions of the overview, which contain the key aspects of the session. Be sure to acquaint yourself with the leader tips, definitions, and any Bonus Activities you may wish to do.
3. Review this Session Leader Guide to determine if any materials might be needed, such as a DVD player, chart paper and markers, a concordance, or hymnals.
4. Keep in mind the conversational nature of Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies. Your role is to facilitate the conversation so that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. In keeping with this interactive “vibe,” please ensure everyone brings or has access to a Bible; have some available just in case. Actual Bible use is at the heart of the purpose of the course.

Session Overview

During this first of four sessions, it will be essential to acquaint the learners with the *Sitz im Leben* (pronounced “ZITS ihm LAY-bun) of the letter to the Galatians. This is a German term used all around the world in the study of literature.

The *Sitz im Leben* is the situation that gives rise to any literary work. Very seldom do people just decide to “write something.” Great writing generally has a purpose, related to a particular problem to solve, insight to share, or position to defend.

We will spend less time on this historical and literary context in Sessions 2–4, but we have to lay the groundwork here in Session 1.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A fascinating “lining up of the planets” was occurring at the time Galatians was written:

1. The Christian movement was less than one generation old. Think back 15 to 20 years ago from today; what year would it be? Not long ago, is it? That’s roughly the time span from Jesus’ ascension to the penning of Galatians.
2. Thus the Christians had not developed much theological clarity, and lots of issues that feel “settled” to us (the Trinity, the creeds, leadership roles) were totally open questions at the time.
3. The Romans were controlling, politically, all of the territory mentioned or alluded to in the letter to the Galatians. Paul, the author, was a Roman citizen. He was from privileged stock.
4. In the part of the Roman Empire (the eastern part) that provides the setting for Galatians, Greek, not Latin (the language of the West and Rome) was the common tongue for commerce and learning.
5. Within this Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire, there was a sizeable Jewish minority. Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew.
6. This Judaism was unlike contemporary Judaism, as the temple and its business were still in full swing. The temple was very much the beating heart of the Jewish faith system.
7. These Jews preserved their identity by the ritual of circumcising males, eating kosher food, and attending national holiday celebrations.
8. Most of the earliest Christians were observant Jews.
9. At the time of the writing of Galatians, little or perhaps none of the New Testament had been written! Jews had access to the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) in both Hebrew and Greek language editions. Paul, from his quotes, obviously preferred the Greek version.
10. At the time of the writing of Galatians, it was unclear as to how Gentiles (non-Jews) could become followers of Jesus.
11. There were two main churches at the time Galatians was written: one in Jerusalem and one in Antioch, near the northeast

corner of the Mediterranean Sea. Paul’s evangelistic work was based out of Antioch.

12. Paul had started Christian communities in Galatia (modern-day Turkey) among non-Jews (Gentiles). Paul’s new Christian converts were not encouraged to follow the law of the Old Testament, be circumcised, have a kosher diet, or celebrate Jewish festivals. It is likely that Paul didn’t even mention these things to them. The communities were based on a transformative encounter with the Spirit of Jesus, which Paul offered by the laying on of hands (see the conversion stories in the book of Acts).

LITERARY CONTEXT

Galatians is a letter. Letters like this are called “polemic” letters (that is, “warlike”). It is, arguably, the most radical, and in some ways, anti-religious book in the Bible. While some take Paul’s arguments against the so-called “Judaizers” in the letter to mean he is against his Jewish heritage, the reality is that he wants to lift up the radical relational nature of the gospel. Christian faith is not about following laws or traditions, though these things are not bad in and of themselves. Christian faith is about faith in the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

People write polemic letters if they have enemies. Paul created enemies wherever he went. Riots, stonings, whippings, jail time—all of these kept emerging during his journeys. This is because Paul threatened religious people, both devout Jews in Jerusalem and idol worshipers in Ephesus. Paul believed, taught, and demonstrated that religion could be replaced with a grace encounter with the living God. This did not make him popular.

What gave rise to the book was that Judaizers (those who believed that all Gentile converts to Christianity had to become observant Jews) were telling the Galatians that they had to get circumcised.

Paul was furious. He fired off this letter to protect the conversions in his little house churches in Galatia.

LUTHERAN CONTEXT

Martin Luther loved the book of Galatians. Paul’s teachings in Galatians formed, through Luther, much of the basis for Lutheran, Reformed, and Evangelical theology. Thus, much of the book will sound “right” to you, if you have Lutheran ears. Luther

SESSION ONE

used the book as leverage against medieval Roman Catholicism, which had grown rule oriented and law centered.

Luther, like Paul, had had profound, transformative grace encounters with the living God. For both of them, these experiences came out of nowhere and rocked them to the core. Neither was “taught” the gospel by other people. Each simply was (multiple times) overcome with God’s gracious presence.

In 1:11 and following, Paul has a “Here I Stand” moment, much like Luther’s appearance in the city of Worms before the Emperor. Martin Luther stood up to the Roman Church and the Emperor. Paul stood up to the Jerusalem church. For both of them it was because they had experienced, in a personal way, the grace of the living God.

DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

A web of rules gets woven around us, beginning in early childhood. Most of the rules are helpful: “Don’t touch the stove or a hot iron!” “Look both ways before crossing the street!”

Some of the expectations, however, are not helpful: “Try it, no one will ever know.” “You really need to be thin to be beautiful.” “People will like you if you overspend to buy this car.” “I want you to help spread this rumor about someone.”

In any case, as we get older, this matrix of expectations can become unbearable. Educators, parents, advertisers, bosses, colleagues, religious leaders, and more can create a thorny bush that grows around us and almost chokes the life out of us. Paul would call this thorny bush, in a collective sense, the “law.”

Both Paul (trying to be a perfect Jew) and Luther (trying to be a perfect monk) snapped under the pressure. They found “grace and peace” in an abiding, from-the-heart relationship with the living God who loved them.

People pleasing, at some point, for all of us, becomes impossible.

One last thought as you prepare: Was Jesus sinless because he met all the expectations around him and kept all the rules (a “law athlete”), or because he lived, totally and consequentially, out of his relationship with the one he called the “Father”? Isn’t that the source of all holiness?

Facilitator's Prayer

Spirit of Jesus, the thorny bush (of what people expect of me) has left “scratches” all over my spirit. You didn’t come into my life as a booster shot to help me please everyone and to keep the law better. You came that by your presence in my life there could be an alternative to the law. When I abide in you in the “here and now,” all is forgiven. Your nature is contagious—when I am with you, your holiness flows into me. Help me to free others from their thorn bushes as we hear your Word. Help me to point them to you. You found Paul. You found Luther. You found me. Find them tonight. Amen.

Gather (10-15 minutes)

Check-in

As this is the first session on this book, you may have a new group formed for this purpose. If so, provide name tags and thank people for giving of their precious time to gather together.

If your group is an existing group, you might start the study in the following way:

Have each person give his or her opinion on the following: On a scale of one to ten, ten being the highest, how high is the awareness of the content of Galatians in:

- Your personal thoughts
- Your congregation
- The general public

If your group is a small, newly formed group, you might ask learners to start with these questions:

- What is your name?
- How did you end up here tonight?
- What happened today that surprised you?

Pray

Living Spirit of Jesus, “people pleasing” has caused a great deal of complexity in our lives—some of it good, some of it not so good. For some, or even many of us, the last 24 hours has been a frantic rush to meet all expectations. Give us quiet and grace so that we can be still and know that you are God of our lives. Amen.



Tip:

If your group is a large group, have learners break into groups of three and discuss the questions.



Tip:

You may choose to begin with a free prayer and invite the group to offer prayers, or you may pray the prayer provided here in unison.

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Tip:

Record on a whiteboard or chart paper the things learners name as making them feel surrounded.



Tip:

Talk about the importance, without shaming anyone, of bringing a Bible to the course. Provide Bibles for those who do not have them. Stress the importance of following along in their Bibles, and give learners permission to write in them. Ask which versions of the Bible they have or they brought. Encourage them to bring their Bibles to church.



Tip:

Take some time explaining where in the Bible Galatians is. Do *not* start the reading until everyone has found it; people get discouraged if they are left behind. Make a light-hearted comment about how you have had trouble finding things in the Bible.



Cities of Galatia:

Galatia was a province in what is modern-day Turkey. The location of the cities mentioned in 1:2 are not certain. Some suggest the cities were in northern Galatia, settled by ethnic Galatians of Celtic origin. Others believe Paul is addressing the cities in the Roman province of Galatia, such as Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul visited these cities during his missionary journey. There were two main churches at the time Galatians was written: one in Jerusalem, and one in Antioch, near the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. Paul's evangelistic work was based out of Antioch.

Focus Activity

Take a look at the Focus Image. Have you ever scraped your hand when reaching for a rose, or fruit such as raspberries or blackberries? Imagine what it would be like to be surrounded by such thorny bushes and not be able to get out. Does your life ever feel like that? Make a list of things (good or bad) that can make us feel surrounded, or even trapped, in life.



Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

This first week, read the session text aloud to the group. There will be other options for text reading in the coming weeks.

Ask the learners to reflect on the following questions after hearing the session texts.

Read Galatians 1:1-24.

- What words or phrases stood out as you listened to the reading?
- What questions were raised for you?
- What did the reading tell you about Paul's temperament and personality?

Record these questions and comments on whiteboard or chart paper, in case you wish to return to them at the end of the session.



Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Historical Context

1. Take a moment to look at the map on p. 15 and locate the following places mentioned in Galatians 1:

Galatia	Jerusalem
Arabia	Damascus
Syria	Cilicia
Judea	

2. Paul was Jewish by birth and trained as a teacher of Jewish faith. How does he describe his life in Judaism (1:13-14)? Even so, what did God call him to do (1:15-16)?



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3. At the time Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians, the Christian movement was less than one generation old. Think back 15 to 20 years ago from today. What year would it be? Not so long ago, is it? That's roughly the time span from Jesus' ascension to the penning of Galatians.

Look at the following statements that summarize the situation in the culture and the early church when Paul wrote to the Galatians. Then reflect on the questions that follow the statements.

- The Romans controlled all of the territory mentioned in the letter to the Galatians.
- Paul was a Roman citizen. He was from privileged stock.
- In the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the setting for Galatians, Greek rather than Latin (the language of the West and Rome) was the common tongue for commerce and learning.
- Within this Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire, there was a sizeable Jewish minority. Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew.



Tip:

With an experienced group, you may be able to move through the historical information quickly. With most groups, however, stay with this until everyone gets the basic historical setting in which Paul was working with the Galatians. Don't leave anyone behind!



Bonus Activity:

Discuss with a partner: How would you describe your "early life" in the church—as a believer (or non-believer)? How does your early experience impact your current life in the church?

Members of this community have no access to creeds, hymns, clergy or other leaders, doctrines, liturgy, or sacraments.

- What do you think these communities would look like?
- What would their “life together” be like?
- How would they pass their “faith experience” to the next generation?

Literary Context

1. Paul used letters to communicate to various churches and individuals. What part of chapter 1 sounds like a letter?
2. Paul quickly gets to the point of his message. What seems to be the issue?
3. What do you make of Paul’s questions in 1:10?
4. Letters like Galatians are called “polemic” (“warlike”) letters. It is arguably the most radical, and in some ways, most anti-religious book in the Bible. People only write polemic letters if they have enemies.
 - Are you able to tell whom Paul might be battling or arguing against?
 - From where has Paul “received” his gospel message?
5. How do dramatic situations often give rise to writing? Name a time when you’ve had a challenging situation that required a written response on your part.

Lutheran Context

1. Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic monk who lived in the early 1500s in Germany. His work helped start the Protestant Reformation. Lutheran churches trace their heritage to the movement he started. Like Paul, Luther wrote a number of polemic letters to address opponents and what he believed to be false teachings. Like Paul, he also faced opposition from many directions. Have a look at the key verse, Galatians 1:10.
 - What do you, as an individual, and the whole group, know about Martin Luther?
 - In what way does Galatians 1:10 remind you of Luther’s temperament?



Tip:

Paul’s letter to the Galatians was an angry response to a specific situation. In chapter 1 we discover that some person or persons have been proclaiming a gospel contrary to the one Paul proclaimed (1:6-9). Exactly how that gospel differed from Paul’s will be clarified in later chapters of Galatians.



Bonus Activity:

Form groups of three and talk about times you’ve pressed “send” for an e-mail while angry and regretted it later. Or, have you ever dropped a letter in a mailbox and wished you could get it back?



Tip:

Try to get learners to see the association between the event that upset you and the letter you wrote in reaction to the event.



Bonus Activity:

Get a copy of the American Declaration of Independence. Underline some key phrases ahead of time. Read those phrases to the group. How does this document address troubles in a constructive way? Discuss the connection between “troubles” and “constructive creative writing.” How do “pearls” of great writing sometimes have irritating sand at their core?



Tip:

You may wish to say more about Martin Luther and his life and work. Check out biographies, articles, or even online sources (see also “For Further Reading,” p. 20 of this guide.)

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Bonus Activity:

Get a copy of the DVD presentation, *Luther: the Movie* (Word Entertainment Inc, 2003). Play the part where Martin Luther confronts the emperor at the Diet of Worms. Make sure to include the part where he says, “Here I stand.”

Bonus Activity:

If Luther or Paul were to visit your church unannounced, what do you think one or the other might think of your congregation? What kind of a letter might either write to your congregation?

Tip:

Be sure to allow time to focus on this section. Don't leave it for the end when there is little time left!

Bonus Activity:

We encourage young people to follow authority. Are there limits to that? Are we clear about what those limits are? Look at Acts 5:29 and Hebrews 13:7. Do you feel the tension between these two verses? How do we choose which of these principles to follow?

Tip:

You could make two columns on a whiteboard or chart paper. Title them “plus” and “minus.” Ask the group to list the pros and cons of **people pleasing**. Write them under the plus and minus headings.

- From what you know about Paul, how are he and Luther similar in temperament?

2. If someone asked you what Lutheranism or being Lutheran is about, what would you say? Is it about following rules and traditions, or is it about something else? Why? Try to give some concrete examples.

3. A key Lutheran principle for interpreting Scripture is an understanding of law and gospel. Based on Galatians 1, what is Paul saying about the gospel? Does he say anything about the law, especially the religious laws and practices that had been part of his Jewish heritage?

Devotional Context

1. Stay with the key verse, Galatians 1:10. What are the pros and cons of people pleasing? Do you think in today's efficient and complex society that meeting the expectations of others has gotten easier or harder over the last 100 years? Why?

2. Look back at the Focus Image. Roses are beautiful, but their stems are filled with thorns. Think of the encroachment of (good and bad) expectations upon you as a thorny thicket of rose bushes surrounding you.

- What is enticing about living according to a set of expectations?
- How do expectations become thorny?

3. Of the following list of motivations, which is most responsible for “growing the rose bush” and feeding our desire to please everyone?

- Fear
- Habit
- Not really knowing God or what God wants
- Lack of love for ourselves
- Hopes of being more popular
- Not having a true purpose or vision for our lives
- Other

4. Draw a series of simple diagrams.
 - a. What life looks like when it is surrounded by expectations (label the expectations if you wish)
 - b. What life looks like when it is based on religious duty or obedience to law
 - c. What life looks like when it is based on a living, grace-filled relationship with God
- Which diagram best describes your situation? Why?
- Which diagram provides the best means for loving our neighbor? Why?

Wrap-up

Return to any of the comments and questions you recorded at the beginning of the session. Ask for additional comments. Then ask other questions, such as:

- What surprised you about your time together? What happened that you were not expecting?
- How might you live differently tomorrow with the insights you gained today?

Pray

Spirit of Jesus, you stand knocking at the door of our lives, and you want to lead us out of the thorny bushes of law and expectations. You have abundant love and grace for us right now, if we would but abide with you long enough to enjoy it. Help us to live free of destructive people pleasing, that we might fully be in the moment with others, with our work, and with you. Give us, right now, the grace and peace that Paul found. Amen.

Extending the Conversation

Homework

1. Read the next session's Bible passage: Galatians 2:1-21.
2. In a journal, reflect on Galatians 1:10. What does it mean for you to be a servant of Christ?
3. In a journal, jot down some thoughts about how you feel about different religions. Is there only one truth, or are there many?



Tip:

If you are comfortable doing so, share some of the difficulties you have in meeting all of the complex expectations that come at you in your daily life. Ask learners to comment and discuss. Help learners to see the radical difference between living to meet all the expectations around us (pleasing people) and living out of a grace-filled loving relationship with God.



Bonus Activity:

Read the following quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation."

Ask the learners to discuss the following questions:

- In what way is this quote true?
- Why is it such a challenge to meet all the expectations others, and we ourselves, have of us?

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Looking Ahead

1. Read next session's Bible passage: Galatians 2:1-21.
2. Read through next session's Leader Session Guide and mark the portions you wish to highlight for the group.
3. Make a checklist of any materials you'll need to do the Bonus Activities.

Enrichment

1. Watch the movie *Forrest Gump* (Paramount, 1994). Is Forrest a people pleaser? Why or why not? Forrest doesn't seem to be hemmed in by any thorny bushes. How does this allow him to have three exceptionally close relationships? How can he be very effective at everything he does, despite low intelligence?
2. Describe the concept of the "rose bush" of compound expectations to someone you know who doesn't go to church. See if that person can relate to it. What kind of language could you use to describe the alternative to the rose bush, the presence of the living God? How could you use language that would not "put off" the person you are talking to?

For Further Reading

Available at augzburgfortress.org:

The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context by Mark Nanos. The author challenges the previously dominant views of Paul as rejecting his Jewish heritage and the law. Nanos instead demonstrates the implications of an intra-Jewish reading. He explores the issues of purity; insiders/outsideers; the character of the gospel; the relationship between groups of Christ-followers in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Galatia; and evil-eye accusations.

Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians by N. T. Wright. A clear exploration of the text by a world-renowned New Testament scholar.

Galatians, Philippians, Augsburg New Testament Commentary, by Donald Juel, John Koenig, and Edgar Krentz. Leading Lutheran scholars discuss two of Paul's letters.

Lutheran Study Bible, Augsburg Fortress, 2009. David Tiede is author of notes and introduction to Galatians.