

Where Can I Begin?

Individual Assessment

Part 1: We Begin by Remembering

1. What memories do you have about reading or not reading the Bible? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ I remember a parent reading the Bible for himself or herself.
- ☐ I experienced a parent or grandparent reading the Bible to or with me.
- ☐ There was a Bible in our home, but I do not recall people reading it.
- ☐ I heard the Bible in Sunday school and/or vacation Bible school.
- ☐ I began reading it for myself when I received a Bible of my own.
- ☐ I have negative memories about the Bible.
- ☐ I encountered study of Scripture or Bible study in campus ministry or college religion courses.
- ☐ I have had little or no opportunity to study the Bible.
- ☐ I received a background in Bible through hearing sermons.
- ☐ I studied the Bible in youth confirmation ministry or adult instruction.
- ☐ I remember thinking about the Bible as a book of faith.
- ☐ Other memories:

2. How do you remember studying the Bible? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ I remember the teacher reading the story as we listened.
- ☐ I remember pastors/teachers giving lectures about the Bible.
- ☐ I remember pastors/teachers leading discussions about the Bible.
- ☐ I had unhelpful or unhealthy encounters with Scripture.
- ☐ I have no memories of studying the Bible within a faith community.
- ☐ I remember filling in workbooks.
- ☐ I memorized verses from the Bible.
- ☐ I remember singing biblical verses in songs and hymns.
- ☐ I remember doing dramatic readings and acting out Bible stories.
- ☐ I remember watching Bible stories on TV and/or using the computer.
- ☐ I remember studying the Bible when I began to teach in Sunday school.
- ☐ I remember:

3. What memories do you have of someone teaching or preaching the Bible well for you?

4. Note two or three basic insights, if any, which were instilled in you from Scripture?

5. What words describe your past experience in studying the Bible?

Part 2: Where Am I Now?

1. Do you have a Bible of your own? More than one? What version(s) do you have?
(Check all that apply.)
 - ☐ Electronic version
 - ☐ King James Version (KJV) or New King James Version (NKJV)
 - ☐ New International Version (NIV)
 - ☐ New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
 - ☐ Revised Standard Version (RSV)
 - ☐ The English Standard Version (ESV)
 - ☐ The Good News Bible (TEV)
 - ☐ The Jerusalem Bible (JB) or New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)
 - ☐ The Message
 - ☐ Other versions:

2. What joys and concerns do you have about the Bible? (Check all that apply.)
 - ☐ I feel intimidated by Bible study.
 - ☐ I enjoy reading the Bible and am strengthened by it.
 - ☐ I think the Bible has little relevance for my life today.
 - ☐ I believe the Bible is mostly a guide for my moral living.
 - ☐ I think the Bible and its interpretation belong not only to the individual worshiper but to the faith community too.
 - ☐ I am troubled by the Bible because of its contents.
 - ☐ I believe pastors should tell people what the Bible says.

- ☐ I do not know how to create a plan for Bible reading or where to start.
- ☐ I study the Bible to learn about God's encounter with humankind.
- ☐ I believe that studying the Bible leads us to Christ.
- ☐ The Bible is God's story and our story.
- ☐ I think that belief in the Bible leads to a prosperous life.
- ☐ I believe that Christ's incarnation, cross, and resurrection are central principles of faith for a community engaging Scripture.
- ☐ I question the reliability of the Bible.
- ☐ I believe every word in the Bible is factual truth.
- ☐ I think that every Christian should engage in Bible study in the community.
- ☐ I believe that through engagement with Scripture people will be strengthened for mission and ministry in daily life.
- ☐ I believe that Scripture interprets Scripture rather than reading Bible passages in isolation or out of context.
- ☐ I interpret the Bible in terms of sin and grace (demand and promise).
- ☐ Other thoughts you have about the Bible:

3. How do you use the Bible now? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ In no personal way, because I do not own a Bible
- ☐ In daily Bible reading
- ☐ As a source of help in time of trouble
- ☐ To help me realize the human situation and God's unconditional love
- ☐ For devotions/conversation among friends and/or family
- ☐ For discussion and growth within my faith community
- ☐ To challenge me to engage in social justice issues
- ☐ I attend a Bible study group outside my congregation.
- ☐ I read a daily devotional book that has some Bible passages.
- ☐ I follow along when Scripture is read in worship services.
- ☐ I have a Bible but do not read it very often.
- ☐ I study the Bible on the Internet.
- ☐ I regularly dig into Scripture in order to empower my ministry in daily life.
- ☐ I am confused by interpretations of the Bible that people around me use.
- ☐ I study the Bible with others to prepare for teaching and/or preaching.
- ☐ Other responses you wish to give:

4. What sources from the world around you influence the way you think about and interpret the Bible?

- ☐ Books that I purchased or received from a friend or coworker

Examples:

___ Radio broadcasts

Examples:

___ Friends and people with whom I spend time each week

What have you learned from them?

___ Speakers at workshops and synod assemblies (conferences, and so on)

___ The Internet

Examples:

___ Television, films, and/or other media.

Examples:

___ Other?

5. What one biblical teaching do you hold as central for your faith today?

Part 3: What Needs Do You Have Regarding the Bible and Its Use?

1. What would be helpful for your own personal growth? (Place a check in the first column next those items that you think are needed. Also place a check in the second column next to those items in which you would participate.)

Needed	Would Participate	
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___	___	Help with developing a plan for reading the Bible
___	___	Basic skills in reading and understanding the Bible
___	___	Further understanding of the various types of biblical literature
___	___	More help with Lutheran doctrine in interpreting Scripture
___	___	An advanced course in digging deeper into Scripture
___	___	An opportunity to learn more about various ways to teach the Bible
___	___	An opportunity to help me connect my biblical faith with daily life
___	___	More help and experience in talking about the Bible with others
___	___	A time to pray the Scriptures and develop some spiritual disciplines
___	___	An opportunity to teach the Bible to others
___	___	A safe environment in which to talk honestly about issues in the Bible
___	___	Other:

2. What do you think is needed in this faith community and in this church body?
(Check all that apply.)

___	I want my church to be more clear about how to interpret the Bible.
___	I believe we need various kinds of opportunities to study the Bible.
___	I think the number of Bible study opportunities we have now is about right.
___	I think we need small groups to help people share faith in caring ways.
___	I think Bible study should begin church meetings.
___	I think we need more kinds of methods for studying Scripture.
___	I think we need more Bible study for these age groups:
___	children
___	youth
___	young adults
___	adults and older adults
___	I think we need training for more people to know how to teach the Bible.

Part 4: What Do I Envision?

From where you are now and given the needs you indicated above, how do you envision the future for you and this faith community? What participation and leadership would you be willing to give?

1. I envision: (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ People loving Scripture and hungry to hear and read more
- ☐ People not debilitated but energized for mission and ministry
- ☐ People enriched and equipped for leadership
- ☐ Individuals using the Bible more regularly for personal prayer
- ☐ A worshiping community recognizing the biblical themes in the liturgy
- ☐ A safe environment where people are not fearful but open to various meanings in a scriptural text
- ☐ People able to use their biblical knowledge to question, learn, and teach
- ☐ People sharing biblical stories across generations
- ☐ A community able to claim and use their Lutheran theology
- ☐ A community able to fluently speak about its faith in Jesus Christ both within the congregation and to people beyond the congregation.
- ☐ A consistency and faithfulness in continuing study

2. What participation and leadership would you be willing to give? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ I would like to join a Bible class.
- ☐ I plan to grow so that I feel more confident reading and interpreting the Bible.
- ☐ I will invite some friends to participate in Bible study.
- ☐ I would like to participate in a more advanced course in Bible study.
- ☐ I feel like a beginner and would welcome a class for where I am now.
- ☐ I am willing to teach or team-teach a Bible course.
- ☐ I would like to receive some support/training in teaching the Bible.
- ☐ I would be willing to help initiate/organize Bible studies.
- ☐ I do not want to be involved in Bible study at this time.

Part 5: What Do I Envision?

1. In what setting did you fill out this assessment?

___ At home, by myself

___ With other family members or friends

___ At church with the whole congregation

___ In a Bible study class

___ Other:

Your faith community may provide an opportunity to share your personal reflections with the entire community.

Name (Optional):

Where Shall We Begin?

Group Assessment/Conversation Tool

Part 1: We Begin by Remembering

1. What opportunities to study the Bible together were offered in this faith community in past years? (Check all that apply.)
 - ☐ Sunday morning classes: ☐ for children ☐ for youth ☐ for adults
 - ☐ Vacation Bible School
 - ☐ Midweek classes: ☐ for children ☐ for youth ☐ for adults
 - ☐ Confirmation ministry and adult instruction using Bible study
 - ☐ Midweek gatherings of women and/or men
 - ☐ Long-term Bible study series
 - ☐ Specific groups. What groups?
 - ☐ Workplace study
 - ☐ Ecumenical groups
 - ☐ Other:

2. As a faith community, share experiences of good Bible study—for example, during certain classes, with teachers, through confirmation ministry, at camp, on retreat, in women and men's groups, and prayer breakfasts:

3. Share with each other challenges or disappointments you have faced as individuals or as a faith community during the past years in regard to the study of the Bible:

4. Tell stories of how you used the Bible during the last year in times of transitions, crises, or celebrations, and what that meant to you:

5. Thinking back over the years, what methods for studying the Bible were used in this faith community in the past? (Check all that apply.)
- ☐ Teachers read the story as we listened.
 - ☐ Pastors/teachers led discussions about the Bible
 - ☐ Pastors/teachers gave lectures about the Bible.
 - ☐ Lay leaders took turns leading the discussion.
 - ☐ Few methods were used because we had very little Bible study at all.
 - ☐ Students filled in workbooks.
 - ☐ Students memorized verses from the Bible.
 - ☐ People made dramatic readings and acted out Bible stories.
 - ☐ People used media (film, video, etc.) to teach the Bible.
 - ☐ Other memories:
6. Think of which of these experiences were unhelpful, boring, disruptive, or discouraging and which were helpful, engaging, and transformative. Why were they this way?
7. Over the years what do you recall were the attitudes toward and impressions of the Bible in the life of this faith community?

Part 2: Where Are We Now?

1. What various versions (including translations and paraphrases) of the Bible do people in your faith community use?
- ☐ Electronic version
 - ☐ King James Version (KJV) or New King James Version (NKJV)
 - ☐ New International Version (NIV)
 - ☐ New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
 - ☐ Revised Standard Version (RSV)
 - ☐ The English Standard Version (ESV)
 - ☐ The Good News Bible (TEV)
 - ☐ The Jerusalem Bible (JB) or New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)
 - ☐ The Message
 - ☐ Other versions:

Group Activity and Conversation

For a gathering of the whole or a committee (council, study group, etc.), ask people to bring Bibles they own. Put all the versions out on the table and explore the collection. Have people share how they use their Bibles. Have them tell stories of when and how they acquired their Bibles.

2. What opportunities for Bible reading and study does this faith community now offer?

- ☐ Sunday morning classes ☐ for children ☐ for youth ☐ for adults
- ☐ Vacation Bible school
- ☐ Midweek classes ☐ for children ☐ youth ☐ adults
- ☐ Confirmation ministry and adult instruction using study of the Bible
- ☐ Midweek gatherings of women and/or men
- ☐ Long-term Bible study series
- ☐ Classes for specific groups
- ☐ Church library with Bible study resources
- ☐ Bible study using the Internet
- ☐ "Lay School of Religion" model available in the local area, conference, or synod
- ☐ Ecumenical groups
- ☐ Neighborhood or workplace Bible study outreach
- ☐ Other:

3. In addition to the reading of Scripture lessons and the proclamation of the word in worship, what other methods of engagement with the Bible does your faith community currently use?

(Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Presentation of the Bible through story, lecture, film, PowerPoint, and so on.
- ☐ Discussion of the meaning of Scripture in small groups.
- ☐ Forums that begin with global issues and topics from daily life and move into Scripture study
- ☐ The telling of Bible stories
- ☐ Study of Scripture in choir or worship planning groups.
- ☐ Memorization
- ☐ Use of art, crafts, music
- ☐ Dramatization of Bible stories
- ☐ Bible Study through e-mail, blog, or website
- ☐ Spiritual direction and praying the Scriptures
- ☐ Family group Bible reading and devotions
- ☐ Pastoral care and peer support groups reading Scripture together
- ☐ Other:

4. What sources (including “secular” and “Christian”) influence the way people in this faith community think about and interpret the Bible?

___ Popular Books

Examples:

___ Radio broadcasts

Examples:

___ Friends, family and coworkers

___ Television, movies and DVDs

Examples:

___ Internet

___ Other:

5. What are the educational opportunities this faith community currently offering those who are already teaching or who are preparing to teach the Bible?

___ Growth in understanding and interpreting the Bible as a book of faith

___ Growth in Lutheran Theology to open the Scriptures

___ Growth in understanding stages of faith development through the life cycle

___ Growth in skill in the use of a variety of Bible study methods

___ Growth in learning how to help people connect the Bible with their ministry in daily life

___ Growth in sharing scriptures with people new to the faith

___ Growth in learning how to help people connect Scripture with issues of justice

___ Growth in use of the Bible in youth and adult catechism classes

6. What is the range of biblical interpretations and beliefs about the Bible that are present in this faith community? (Check all that apply.)

___ The Bible is inerrant and is to be read as literal truth.

___ The Bible is the Word of God.

___ The Bible's historical accuracy is questionable in many places.

___ The Bible is a guidebook for moral living.

___ The Bible tells us interesting and important stories about ancient people.

___ The Bible contains ambiguities and is open to multiple interpretations.

___ The Bible is about the human predicament and God's unconditional love.

___ The Bible is just a book of interesting stories.

___ Justification by grace through faith focuses engagement with the Bible.

___ The Bible is the book of faith of the community, not simply the book of faith for

the individual worshiper.

- ☐ Engagement with the Bible through study, prayer, and conversation meets a deep spiritual hunger and a need for meaning in people's lives.
- ☐ The Bible can help us be a faith community and the Body of Christ in the world.
- ☐ Engagement with the Scriptures helps the baptized carry out their vocations in daily life.
- ☐ Belief in the Bible leads to a prosperous life.
- ☐ Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection are central to engagement with Scripture.
- ☐ The pastor alone determines the Bible truths.
- ☐ Scripture interprets Scripture.
- ☐ People of all ages and backgrounds, including children, can engage the Bible.
- ☐ The Bible speaks directly about moral issues today.
- ☐ The Bible predicted current events and predicts future events.
- ☐ The community hears the Bible as law and gospel.
- ☐ Studying the Bible as a book of faith equips people for discipleship.
- ☐ Other interpretations and beliefs about the Bible present in this faith community:

7. The following obstacles to engage with the Bible are found in this faith community: (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Scripture is often taught and read in ways that are confusing or moralistic or simply boring.
- ☐ People, especially youth and young adults, have very few positive role models for significant engagement with Scripture.
- ☐ Bible study opportunity is offered but people simply won't come.
- ☐ Reading itself is a challenge for some people.
- ☐ Fundamentalist people and literalist people seem to be dominating how the Bible is interpreted and how Bible reading is seen in our society.
- ☐ People think that the Bible is an ancient text that really has nothing to say to people's real lives today.
- ☐ People are suspicious of and/or resistant to invitations to join Bible study.
- ☐ People hear theological language that they don't understand.
- ☐ People are just too busy to study the Bible.
- ☐ All the violence in the Bible is problematic.
- ☐ People see inconsistencies in the Bible and would like the Bible to give them simple answers to complex problems.

8. What Bible studies have been led by the pastor(s) in the past two years?

9. What Bible studies have other leaders led in the past two years?

10. What Bible studies have lay people led in the past two years?

11. What does this faith community know about biblical interpretation in other Christian denominations?
How do other churches in the area use the Bible? Are ecumenical studies offered in this community?

For Group Conversation

Invite Christians of various denominations to gather to talk about the ways they use the Bible. Talk about differences or similarities in biblical interpretation within your faith community and among the various church bodies and where diversity of interpretations comes from.

12. For further exploration (when possible) : What do people in this faith community know about the sacred texts of other faiths, e.g., the Koran?

Other Conversation

13. Invite people of varying religious faiths to gather to share central themes of their sacred texts.
Discuss basic texts that are the center of faith with one another.

Part 3: What Needs Do We Have?

1. Is there a safe environment for people to talk about their varied, challenging, even contradictory views about what the Bible means? How could it be a place where people are able to be open and honest when asking questions and sharing doubts? What are these places? What is still needed? How can leaders help create such trustworthy places?
2. Are people able to use the Bible as a book of faith to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with members of their families? Their friends? People with whom they spend their week? With a stranger? What would further equip people to be able to do this?
3. Have people in this faith community experienced any of the following in regard to Bible reading and study? (Check all that apply.)
 - ☐ Shyness or discomfort speaking using images, stories, and themes from the Bible to speak about their faith
 - ☐ Feelings of guilt or shame for a past inability to read, understand, or study the Bible
 - ☐ Inability or unwillingness to make reading and studying the Bible a priority in their lives
 What would help them move beyond these feelings?
4. Are people able to study the Bible in such a way that they are able to relate it to their daily lives and daily ministries? What methods and resources would help them?
5. On a continuum from apathetic to energetic, where does this faith community fall in regard to its engagement with the Bible?

Apathetic

Energetic

What would help this faith community become more excited about reading and studying the Bible?

6. Are people able to engage the Bible in ways that help them really be inside the texts, to hear, see, smell, and taste what is going on with God and God's people? What would help them engage the texts more fully?

7. Are people studying the Bible together in ways that strengthen and equip them for carrying out God's mission? What is needed to help them do so?

Group Conversation

Create an open opportunity to talk in depth about what people believe is the calling of your faith community for mission in the world.

- Some may express the need to share God's grace in Jesus Christ.
- Some may talk about concern for the earth.
- Some may emphasize care for the poor.
- Some may want to be equipped more fully for working for justice and peace.

How does their study of Scripture foster these things and more? What is needed?

8. What is needed so that people in this faith community become more fully equipped to be teachers of the Bible?

- ☐ We have enough teachers now and they have sufficient teacher training.
- ☐ We have more teachers than we have people wanting to come to classes.
- ☐ We need more teachers for
- ☐ young children
 - ☐ youth
 - ☐ young adults
 - ☐ adults and older adults
 - ☐ other groupings. What are they?

- ☐ Our teachers need ongoing study in Bible and biblical interpretation.
- ☐ Our teachers need basic education in how to design a class and use various methods of engaging the Bible at various stages of faith formation.
- ☐ Parents, baptismal sponsors, and grandparents need to be better equipped to share the Bible as a book of faith.
- ☐ Other needs:

9. How might the pastor(s) role in teaching the Bible be enhanced?
10. What roles can other leaders play in teaching the Bible?
11. How might a conference or cluster of congregations offer ongoing teaching education?

Part 4: What Do We Envision?

Group Conversation

Envision a faith community in which each person had numerous opportunities for Bible study at his or her life stage. Give each person time to sit quietly and either write or think about dreams they have for the future.

What would this faith community look like if all members were reading the Bible daily and each person was part of a group Bible study on a regular basis?

Take time to share those dreams with the group.

1. What would it take to have some of those dreams become reality? Discuss:

Why do we want to be engaged with the Bible?

Who will be involved? Who will be leaders?

What gifts do we have among us in this faith community?

What Bible study opportunities do we now have that we should affirm and support?

What new opportunities should we plan to start?

When should we start them? Right away? After some exploration and planning?

When and where should they be?

How will we do this?

How can we build on the gifts we now have among us in this faith community? What educating and equipping will be necessary?

2. What difficulties do you envision? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ People will not take the time to come.
- ☐ People will disagree.
- ☐ People will say they will come and start and then will not continue.
- ☐ People will not trust each other enough to be able to acknowledge and discuss differences.
- ☐ People will become more divided over social issues based on different interpretations of the Bible.
- ☐ Other:

3. Some ideas to respond to challenges and to put your visions into practice: (Be bold!)

- A. "There are not enough people coming to our Sunday morning Bible study now."

Then, start two more. People may need a variety of methods, times, places.

- B. "People don't find the Bible relevant to their daily lives."

Then, go to the places of daily ministry where people are. Walk with them, and listen to them express themselves in the "languages" of their workplace, e.g., "business," "engineering," "coffee shop," "medicine." Start with the questions people ask in the midst of their daily lives.

- C. "We need to emphasize evangelism more than education."

Then, begin a Bible study in the neighborhood. Perhaps work together with ecumenical partners. Reach out to share the good news of the gospel and share the Scriptures to help people grow in that good news.

- D. "People would rather spend their time in leisure activities."

Then, use television, movies, novels, and the Internet as opportunities for discussion and engagement with biblical themes.

- E. "People are so divided over social issues, and it all ends up in disagreement over how we interpret Scripture."

Then, begin a class on various ways to interpret Scripture. Listen well to each other.

F. "We need Bible study for our youth more than we need it for adults."

Then, start classes for adults. Youth need to see adults questioning, studying and growing in their own faith, digging deeply into Scripture, and becoming strong in their ability to speak about God. Use these growing adults as mentors and guides and teachers of children and youth.

4. Envision specifically some areas on which to concentrate. Check the ones that would be helpful in your faith community. You may want to number them to prioritize your list

- ☐ Neighborhood and workplace
- ☐ Family settings
- ☐ Small groups
- ☐ Faith forums on ethical and justice issues
- ☐ Specific groups—for example, church councils, grief groups, women's groups, men's breakfasts, and marriage preparation
- ☐ Worship planning to become more aware of Scripture in the liturgy
- ☐ All meetings in the faith community (as a regular part of those meetings)
- ☐ Artistic forms of encountering Scripture (art, music, drama . . .)
- ☐ Congregational or intercongregational Bible study through e-mail, blog, or website
- ☐ Continuing education for more advanced study of Scripture
- ☐ Synod, conference, or cluster events
- ☐ Congregational or multicongregational teacher education events
- ☐ Other:

5. Graced by the Spirit, envision how this faith community might be described five years from now:

- ☐ People loving Scripture and hungry to hear and read more
- ☐ A consistency and faithfulness in continuing study
- ☐ People not debilitated but energized for mission and ministry
- ☐ People enriched and equipped for leadership
- ☐ Individuals using the Bible more regularly for personal prayer
- ☐ People sharing the Bible as a book of faith across generations
- ☐ A safe environment where people are not fearful but open to various meanings in a scriptural text
- ☐ People able to use their biblical knowledge to question, learn, and teach
- ☐ A community able to claim and use their Lutheran theology
- ☐ A community able to fluently speak about its faith in Jesus Christ
- ☐ Other: