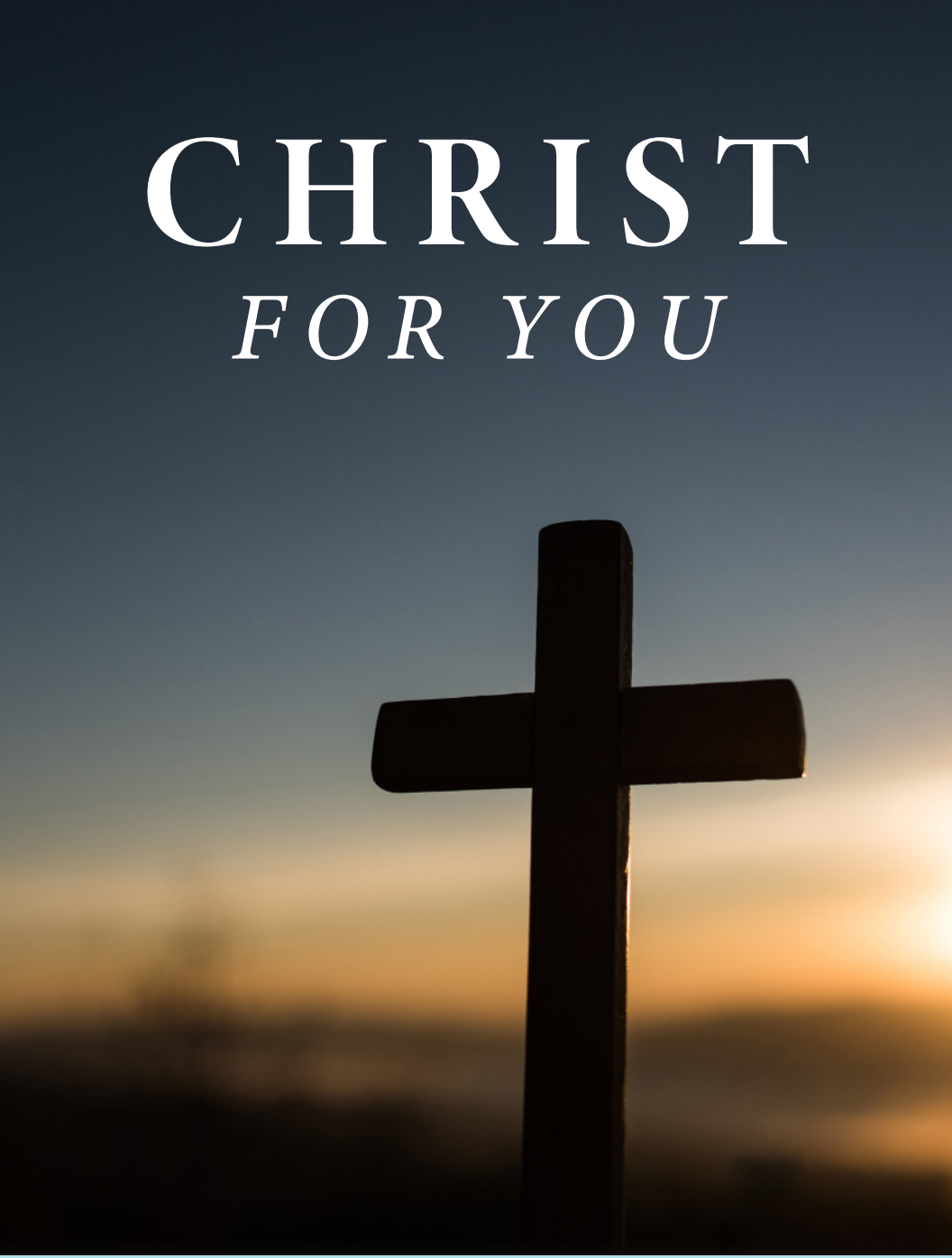
CHRIST
FOR YOU



LEADER'S GUIDE

PASTOR MARK ANDERSON

First, thank you.

Not for being perfect
or prepared, but for
simply being here.

Thank you for stepping into a role that doesn't depend on your answers, your confidence, or your résumé. In a world that rewards polish and performance, your willingness to speak the Word is itself a confession: in the freedom of faith, you may trust the One who speaks through weakness.

INTRODUCTION FOR LEADERS

Leading these sessions doesn't require charisma or theological fluency. You don't need to "bring the Spirit." You don't need to "make it work." You don't even need to feel ready. Just be here. The Word will find its way. It always does.

Because that's how faith comes—not by effort, not by emotion, not by spiritual technique, but by hearing the Word.

And that Word? It will come for you, too. You are standing under the Word where Christ meets us all. The leader is not above the Word. You are its first hearer, its first target. It will kill what needs killing and raise what only God can raise. Be prepared.

This class does not rise from theory, but from years in the congregation, walking beside the weary, the distracted, the grieving, the curious and joyous, the skeptical, and the quietly hungry. Time and again, I have seen it: the Word finds them. Not always loudly. Not always at once. But surely, and with abundant mercy, bringing, to use Martin Luther's famous words, "Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation."

NOTE: Each section heading below is paired with Scripture references to help you see the biblical framework that grounds this approach. These verses are not proof-texts, but living testimony to the truth that God's Word does the work, in you, through you, and for those you are called to serve. So, have your Bible handy and look these up as you read through this introduction.

BEGIN WITH PRAYER (BUT NOT FOR POWER)

(1 Corinthians 2:1–5)
Start simply. Not for eloquence or control, but to remember who is doing the real work:

"Lord, speak through Your Word. We are sinners. You are merciful. Give us ears to hear. Amen."

THIS CLASS IS NOT ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

(John 15:3; Matthew 16:18; 1 Peter 1:23–25)
Let's be clear from the start: this class is not about promoting the institution of the church. Yes, your congregation matters. Yes, you'll want to talk about your setting, your people, your joys, your challenges. But this is not a strategy session. It's not about saving, reviving, or reinventing the church. The church does not live by clever planning or energetic volunteers. It lives by the Word. You will not be able to emphasize this too strongly.

What we're doing here is far more basic, and far more powerful. We are returning to the one thing, the only thing, that gives the church life: the voice of Christ, crucified and risen, speaking into real lives right now through Word and Sacrament.

So don't get distracted by institutional anxieties—empty pews, shrinking budgets, cultural irrelevance. The church is not our project. It is God's creation, sustained by His promise. Your task is simple and joyful: open your mouth and hand over the goods.

THE SETTING DOESN'T MATTER—THE WORD DOES

(Matthew 18:20; John 1:14)
Maybe it's a fellowship hall with metal chairs and a stubborn thermostat. Maybe it's a quiet living room or a noisy Sunday school room with crayons under the table. That's okay. Wherever two or three are gathered, Christ is present.

These sessions are not about ambiance.
They are about presence—His presence.
Not your mood. Not group dynamics.
Just the living Christ, showing up where He has promised to be: in His Word.

TWO WORDS: LAW AND GOSPEL

(Romans 3:19–20; Romans 5:6–8; Ephesians 2:4–5; Galatians 2:19–20)
God speaks to us in two ways—and we must not confuse them:

- The **Law** delivers the truth about us. It doesn't negotiate. It accuses. It strips us bare of all illusions, all self-justification. It kills.

- The **Gospel** delivers the truth about Christ. It doesn't wait for readiness. It doesn't inspect your progress. It simply forgives, justifies, and raises the dead—all as sheer gift.

Are these just theological abstractions? Absolutely not! They are the living way God addresses sinners. One word confronts. The other word saves. One word exposes your need. The other meets it—fully, without condition. Learning to make this distinction is critical.

This is not just the rhythm of good teaching. It is the pulse of Christian life: death and resurrection, over and over again. What Martin Luther called the daily return to baptism.

LEAD BY LISTENING

(Isaiah 30:15; Mark 4:26–27)
You don't have to make conversation "flow."
You don't have to fix awkward silences.
The Word does not need help. It needs space.

Sometimes the most faithful leadership looks like this:

- Read the passage. Present the material.
- Ask the question.
- Wait.
- Listen.

If no one says a word, don't panic. That silence may be the moment God's Word is doing its deepest work, cracking defenses, uncovering hidden wounds, planting faith. It may be falling on others. It may be falling on you. Expect to be struck by the Word. That's how it works.

YOU'RE NOT THE CHEF

(John 6:35)
Here's the image: You didn't cook the meal. You don't adjust the seasoning. You just bring it to the table while it's hot.

Or better yet: You're not the chef. You're not even the waiter. You're the beggar who gets to say, "Look—this is where the bread is!"

You don't need to manufacture a spiritual moment. Just hand over the goods. That's it.

PEOPLE WILL COME IN ALL CONDITIONS

(Isaiah 55:11)
Tired. Skeptical. Distracted. Doubting. Guarded. Hopeful. Some will look disengaged. Others will be ready before they realize it.

Don't manage reactions. Just keep pointing to Christ.

Some sessions will feel electric. Some will feel flat. Most will seem ordinary. But the Word is never ordinary. It never returns empty. It always finds its mark, even when we don't see it.

WHEN IN DOUBT, SAY THIS

(John 1:29; Hebrews 12:2)
"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

That's your line. That's your role. That's what this class is for. It's not about us. It never was. It's about Him—and what He alone has done, is doing, and will do.

A FINAL WORD

(1 Thessalonians 2:13; Matthew 11:28–30)
So may the Spirit give you courage and freedom to speak, humility to listen, and joy in a Word that does what it says. You are not alone. Christ Jesus has gone before you. He goes with you. And He will do the heavy lifting.

NOW GO—DELIVER THE GOODS!

Chapter One

One God, Two Words

SESSION AIM

To help participants understand that God speaks in two distinct and essential ways—Law and Gospel—and that the entire Christian life is lived in the rhythm of those two words: the Word that exposes and the Word that heals. Faith is not our work, but the result of God's Word doing what it says—killing and making alive.

OPENING WORD TO THE LEADER

Begin here:

"Why go to church again and again? Because we keep forgetting. And God keeps speaking."

This session lays the groundwork for everything else in Christian life and theology. Law and Gospel are not theological categories for pastors and professors—they are how God addresses us every day. We come not to perform or improve ourselves but to be spoken to—honestly, clearly, mercifully.

Encourage the group to pay attention not just to what *we* say about God, but to what *God* says to us—and how He does it in two distinct ways.

CORE THEMES

1. Faith Is a Gift, Not an Achievement
We are not called to drum up belief or prove our sincerity. We are called to *hear*. And when God speaks, His Word creates what it commands—just like it did at creation.

- "Let there be light"—and there was.
- "You are forgiven"—and you are.

"Faith is not the result of effort. It's what happens when the Gospel breaks in and grabs hold of you."

2. God Speaks in Two Words: Law and Gospel
God's Word comes in two distinct voices, both from the same mouth, but doing very different work.

- The **Law** tells us what to do—and reveals that we haven't done it.
- The **Gospel** tells us what Christ has done—for us—and gives what it says.

These two words are not in competition. They are God's two hands—one that tears down, and one that raises up.

"The Law shows you your death. The Gospel gives you Christ's life."

3. The Law Is Good—But It Cannot Save
The Law is not the enemy. It is God's holy will. But it cannot produce what it demands. It can tell you to love, but it cannot make you love. It shows the truth of who you are—but offers no help.

- The Law is a mirror, not a medicine.
- Its job is to expose, not to fix.

"The Law does its best work when it drives you to despair of yourself—and into the arms of Christ."

4. The Gospel Doesn't Demand. It Delivers.
Where the Law says "Do," the Gospel says "Done." It doesn't wait for you to respond. It creates the response. It doesn't ask you to rise. It raises you.

- The Gospel doesn't tell you what to do.
- It tells you what Christ has done—and gives you the benefit.

"The Law tells you who you *should* be. The Gospel tells you who you *are* in Christ: forgiven, free, beloved."

5. The Rhythm of the Christian Life: Law Then Gospel
This rhythm isn't just for the beginning of faith—it's the ongoing shape of faith. Daily, we hear the Law: "You have not done what you should." And daily we hear the Gospel: "Christ has done it for you."

- The Law kills.
- The Gospel raises.
- This is daily dying and rising in baptism.

"God's final Word to you is not Law. It is Gospel."

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- **Romans 10:17** – Faith comes by hearing.
- **John 15:16** – You did not choose me, but I chose you.
- **1 Corinthians 12:3** – No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.
- **Genesis 1:3** – "Let there be light"—and there was.
- **Galatians 3:24** – The Law as a tutor to lead us to Christ.
- **2 Corinthians 5:21** – Christ made sin so we might become God's righteousness.

Read a few of these out loud. Ask the group: *Which of these passages sounds like Law? Which sound like Gospel?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you name a time in your life when the Law came through clearly—when you were exposed or convicted? How did it feel?

2. Have you ever heard a message that was only Law or only Gospel? What was missing?

3. Why is it essential that the Gospel always follows the Law—and not the other way around?

4. What does it look like to speak both Law and Gospel to a friend who's struggling—with shame, addiction, failure, doubt?

CLOSING WORD TO THE LEADER

Let this be your final word:

"The Law will speak. And it will be true. It will name sin. But it will not be the last word. Christ is the last word. And He is for you."

The power of Christian teaching isn't in balance. It's in order: first the truth that convicts, then the promise that saves. That is how God creates faith. That is how He keeps it alive.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of Truth and Mercy,
You speak, and we live. You confront us with Your Law—showing us what we've failed to be. And then You speak again, giving us Christ— our forgiveness, our righteousness, our hope. Teach us to hear both words, to be honest about our need, and to cling to Your final promise: That in Christ, every sin is forgiven, and we belong to You.
Amen.

Chapter Two

Our Brokenness, Struggles, and Imperfections

SESSION AIM

To help participants wrestle honestly with the Christian life as *simul iustus et peccator*—fully righteous and fully sinner—and to discover in this tension the freedom of the gospel.

OPENING WORD TO THE LEADER

Begin the session not with solutions, but with a pause. A breath. This chapter isn't a how-to manual. It's a mirror held up to our lives—and it's not a funhouse mirror meant to distort or flatter. It's a true mirror. We gather not to improve ourselves, but to die and be raised. Again.

Remind participants that this session won't end with a 5-step program for fixing the human heart. It will end where Scripture ends: with a cry—"Who will rescue me from this body of death?"—and the gospel answer, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

CORE THEMES

1. The Human Condition Is Not a Problem to Solve
Let that land. Our brokenness isn't a puzzle we'll eventually figure out. It's a condition from which we must be rescued. That rescue comes not by progress, but by promise.

"Faith isn't a ladder. It's a fall—and a catching."

2. The Offense of the Gospel
People will struggle with *simul iustus et peccator*. Why? Because it goes against everything we've been taught about growth, improvement, and earning our keep. But the Christian life is not self-help; it is daily death and resurrection.

3. The Present-Tense Mercy of Christ
Stress that Christ loves the real you. Not the Instagram you. Not the disciplined devotional life you. Not the future "spiritually mature" you. Just you. Here. Now. That's gospel.

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- **Romans 7:14–25** – Paul's inner battle is not the prelude to faith—it *is* the life of faith.
- **Galatians 2:16** – Justification by faith apart from works.
- **Psalm 51** – David's honest confession: "Surely I was sinful from birth..."

Invite participants to read these passages slowly, maybe even aloud, and listen for *where the voice of grace breaks in.*

Ask participants to *sit in the tension* rather than rush to resolve it.

Let silence do its work. Encourage honesty, not performance. This is not a time for pretending you've got it all together. It's a time for naming what's real—and hearing again that Christ has already claimed you in that real place.

"If you must fall apart, do it here. Christ has already been to the bottom."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What's hard for you to accept about the idea that you are both 100% justified and 100% sinner—right now?

- Follow-up: What would it change in your life if you believed Christ met you there, not after improvement?

2. Why do we cling so tightly to the idea of personal spiritual progress?

- Does it help us? Or does it burden us?

3. What do you make of the phrase: "Faith clings to God's promise, not a performance review"?

- How might this reshape your prayer life? Your self-image?

4. Where in your life have you felt most unworthy—and heard grace anyway?

- This is a testimony question. Don't force answers. Let people share if they feel led.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
you meet us in our weakness, not with demands, but with mercy.
Thank you for loving us as we are— sinner and saint, all at once.
Keep us clinging to your promise, and raise us again tomorrow.
Amen.

Chapter Three

A Fractured Creation

SESSION AIM

To help participants understand that sin and redemption are not private or internal matters alone, but cosmic, relational realities that affect the whole of creation—and that salvation is not human partnership with God, but God's unilateral act through Christ's death and resurrection.

OPENING WORD TO THE LEADER

Begin this session by reminding the group:

We're not the main characters in this story. Creation is not our project to fix, nor a backdrop for our spiritual journey. The world—every leaf, every sigh of the wind, every groan of the earth—is caught up in the drama of sin and redemption. And it is God's Word, not our wisdom, that holds all things together.

Invite participants to suspend both their optimism and their cynicism for a moment—and listen for what Scripture actually says: that everything—everything—is broken, yes, but also being redeemed. Not by us, but by Christ alone.

CORE THEMES

1. Creation is Not Neutral—It's Relational
Creation didn't just *happen* and then move on autopilot. God's Word didn't just speak at the beginning—it *sustains*. What that means is this: the world is not simply matter in motion, but something deeply bound to the voice and will of the Creator.

"Let there be..." wasn't just a moment. It's the condition of our existence.

This includes us. We do not live independently of God's Word. We are *spoken into being*—and when that Word is resisted, creation itself groans.

2. Sin Is More Than Personal Failure—It's a Cosmic Rupture
The Christian faith doesn't treat sin as a bad habit. It's not something you outgrow. And it's not just individual. Sin warps everything—relationships, systems, landscapes, even time itself. Romans 8 says it plainly: the whole creation groans.

That means the story of salvation is not a spiritual escape hatch for individuals—it's the restoration of all things.

3. The Word Repents Us—We Don't Repent Ourselves
Here's a key distinction to hold: we do not define sin by how bad we feel. We confess sin *because God names it*. And we are not changed by understanding our problems—we are changed by the living Word of God that puts the old to death and raises the new.

"We don't repent so God will forgive us. God's Word repents us so He *can* forgive us."

4. The Two Ditches: Progress and Preservation
This is crucial. On one side, we think we can fix the world. On the other, we refuse to change at all.

- **The progress trap** says, "We're evolving! With the right policies and tech, we'll fix the world."
- **The preservation trap** says, "We must cling to the way it's always been."

Both are lies. One idolizes novelty; the other idolizes nostalgia.

The gospel doesn't promise a better version of what's dying. It promises resurrection.

5. No Partnership in Salvation
Let this be heard clearly:
We don't partner with God to save the world.
We don't co-author redemption.
We don't complete what Christ started.
The cross wasn't the beginning of a project for us to finish.
It was the *finish* of a death only God could die—and a life only God could give.

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- **Genesis 1:1–3; 3:17–19** – Creation as spoken, cursed, and sustained.
- **Romans 8:18–25** – Creation groaning, waiting in hope.
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** – New creation in Christ, not in us.
- **Colossians 1:19–20** – Christ reconciling *all things*.

Invite participants to read these aloud together and ask, *Where is the good news here?* Not the advice. The announcement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does seeing sin as a cosmic fracture shift your understanding of what's wrong in the world?

- Follow-up: How does it deepen your understanding of what the cross actually accomplishes?

2. Which ditch do you tend to fall into: the belief that we can fix the world, or the belief that we must protect it from ever changing?

- What's appealing about that ditch? What does the cross say to it?

3. Have you ever seen a church or community confuse tradition with faithfulness?

- What helps distinguish between the two?

4. What does it mean to live as if Christ has already begun the new creation?

- How might that change our hope—and our humility?

CLOSING WORD TO THE LEADER

Don't feel pressure to tie it all up. Let the Word linger. Let the gospel stand.

"We're not waiting for a better version of ourselves or our institutions. We're waiting for the One who makes all things new."

That's our hope. Not in what we build, protect, or preserve—but in the Word that spoke the world into being and will speak again.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord of all creation,
You have spoken, and we live.
You have seen our brokenness, and You have not turned away.
Speak again, Lord.
Speak into our fear, our pride, our decay.
Undo us, and raise us.
Not by progress, not by preservation,
but by Your cross—
and by the life that only You can give.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Chapter Four

Mercy in the Material

SESSION AIM

To help participants understand that God meets us not in our striving or sincerity, but in actual things—water, bread, wine, and words—because that is where we are, and that is where He has promised to be. The sacraments are not spiritual accessories, but the delivery system of the gospel—*for you.*

OPENING WORD TO THE LEADER

Begin by naming the elephant in the room:

"Most people think faith is about going up to God—being better, climbing higher, getting stronger. But the gospel doesn't work that way. God comes down. Into real stuff. Into real mess. Into you."

Invite the group to suspend their spiritual assumptions about what's "holy" or "sacred" and listen for something far more earthy—and far more merciful. The sacraments aren't abstract ideas or private emotional experiences. They are God's concrete way of delivering forgiveness right into your body and into your life.

CORE THEMES

1. God Comes Down—Not as a Concept, but in the Concrete
The scandal of the gospel is not just that God forgives sinners—it's *how* He does it. Not through visions or virtues, but through common, created things. God is not allergic to matter. He made it. He uses it. And He meets us in it.

"If you want to find Jesus, don't stare into your soul. Look where He promised to be."

2. Baptism: Daily Death, Daily Resurrection
Baptism is not a warm welcome into religious life. It's a death sentence for the old you and a promise of new life in Christ.

- Baptism is *not* your declaration of faith.
- It's God's declaration of mercy.
- It's not a one-time event you remember.
- It's a daily reality you live from. "Every morning, God drowns the sinner and raises the child. And He never grows tired of doing it."

3. The Supper: Christ, for You
The Lord's Supper is not a reenactment, a symbol, or a memory trick. It's not your sincerity that makes it effective. It's *Christ's promise.*

- He gives you Himself: His body, His blood, His victory.
- He puts it in your mouth.
- And He says, "This is *for you.*"

This is where sin dies and forgiveness lives.

4. Sacraments Are Not About the How, But the Why
People trip over the mechanics. "How can this be?" The better question is, "Why would He do this?"

"Because He promised to. And because you need Him."

Let that be enough. It was enough for the thief on the cross. It's enough for you.

5. God Doesn't Bypass Creation—He Reclaims It
We're the ones always trying to ascend—through techniques, purity, or piety. But God refuses our escape routes. He uses the very stuff we'd rather transcend—water, food, words. Because He's not ashamed of His creation. He's redeeming it.

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- **Romans 6:3–4** – Baptism as death and resurrection with Christ.
- **Titus 3:5–7** – Baptism as rebirth by the Holy Spirit.
- **Matthew 26:26–28** – Christ's own words at the Supper.
- **1 Corinthians 10:16–17** – Communion creates community.
- **John 1:14** – The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Encourage reading these aloud, and ask: *What does God promise to do here? And how does He deliver it?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think it's so tempting to search for God in personal feelings or mystical experiences instead of in the sacraments?

- Follow-up: What changes when you believe He meets you in water, bread, and wine?

2. What does baptism being a "daily death and resurrection" mean for how you see your life right now—not just your past?

3. How does the Lord's Supper shape your understanding of community, forgiveness, and what it means to belong?

4. Have you ever asked, "How can this possibly work?" What happens when you instead ask, "Why would God do this?"

CLOSING WORD TO THE LEADER

Your job isn't to explain the sacraments. It's to deliver them—or point to where they're delivered. Let the mystery remain. Let the promise stand.

"God doesn't save you by giving you a ladder. He saves you by giving you Jesus—in water, in bread, in wine, in Word. Because that's where you are. And that's where He promised to be."

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
You did not stay far off. You came all the way down.
Into water. Into bread and wine. Into us.
Thank You for meeting us in things we can touch, taste, and trust.
Keep dragging us back to those promises, until the day You raise us for good.
Amen.

Chapter Five

Vocation: Freed from Ourselves, Freed for Others

SESSION AIM

To help participants grasp that the Christian life is not about climbing toward spiritual greatness but descending into ordinary life, where Christ meets the world through them. Vocation is not a heroic mission. It is freedom to serve, to suffer, and to love—because Christ has already done the saving.

OPENING WORD TO THE LEADER

Start with the phrase that cuts against everything we've been taught:

"*You don't have to save the world.*"

Watch the room. That sentence will either feel like a relief—or an offense. Maybe both. But it's the gospel truth.

This chapter isn't about discovering your "calling" through introspection or ambition. It's about how Christ sets you free from the exhausting business of self-justification so you can finally show up in your actual life—for your neighbor, for creation, for the world Christ died to redeem.

CORE THEMES

1. Vocation Is Not a Quest for Meaning—It's the Gift of Being Needed
Vocation is not about "finding your purpose." It's not something you achieve or a job title you earn. It's where God puts you and says, "*Your neighbor needs you here.*"

- Where are you? That's your call.
- Who needs you? That's your neighbor.
- What are you doing? That's your vocation.

"God doesn't need your good works," Luther once said. "But your neighbor does."

2. You're Not Justifiied by Your Work—You're Freed for It
This is the great reversal: you don't serve others to earn God's approval. You already have it. You are justified. The cross settled that.

So now, you're set loose—not to chase spiritual achievement, but to be *available* to others. Not because you're strong or holy or impressive, but because Christ has made you His.

"You're not sent to be amazing. You're freed to be faithful. Right where you are."

3. Vocation Is Cross-Shaped
You will suffer. That's not a sign of failure. It's the shape of the Christian life. Parents, teachers, nurses, mechanics, caregivers—none of them are celebrated daily. But all of them carry a cross.

- That cross isn't a punishment. It's a mark of your participation in Christ's own way of being in the world.
- And wherever there is a cross, there is Christ. Not in glory, but in sweat, silence, and faithfulness.

4. Creation Matters
Vocation isn't limited to human relationships. It extends to all of creation. God hasn't given up on the world—and neither do we.

"Tending the earth isn't an environmental hobby. It's a holy calling."

Fix what's broken. Feed what's hungry. Make beauty. It won't earn your salvation, but it might be how Christ feeds the world through you.

5. When It Feels Like Too Little—It Isn't
The world shouts, "Make an impact!" But the gospel whispers, "You are enough." That whisper may be all you need to hear when you feel burned out or unseen.

No act of love is wasted. No neighbor is beneath you. No calling is too small. The vine gives life to the branch—not the other way around (John 15:5).

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- **Galatians 5:1, 13** – Freedom from self for service to others.
- **John 15:1–5** – Christ as the vine, we as branches. Apart from Him, nothing.
- **Philippians 2:5–8** – The descent of Christ in humility and service.

- **Colossians 3:17, 23–24** – Doing all in the name of Christ.
- **Romans 12:1–8** – Offering ourselves in service, uniquely gifted.

Have participants read these aloud. Then ask: *What do these verses free you from? What do they free you for?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What expectations do you feel (internally or culturally) to "make a difference"? How does the theology of vocation reframe that pressure?

2. Where has Christ already placed you—and who is your neighbor in that place?

3. Can you name a moment where your ordinary, daily life became an unexpected place of ministry?

4. How does knowing you're already justified change the way you show up in relationships, work, or responsibilities?

5. What makes it hard to trust that small, quiet acts of love matter?

CLOSING WORD TO THE LEADER

Keep it grounded:

"You are not sent to be a hero. You are freed to be human. To hold a hand. To make the coffee. To speak the truth. To plant the garden. That's not settling for less. That's where Christ shows up."

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
You have done everything we could not.
You have freed us from the weight of proving ourselves.
Now teach us to live freely—
to serve our neighbor,
to love what You love,
and to carry the cross You've already borne.
Let Your mercy show through our ordinary days.
And when we fall, hold us again in Your promise:
You are mine. You are forgiven. You are free.
Amen.

Chapter Six

Worship: God Shows Up for You

SESSION AIM

To help participants see worship not as something they do *for* God, but as the primary place God comes *to* them—with mercy, with forgiveness, and with Christ Himself. Worship is not performance. It's promise. It's not a production. It's a proclamation.

OPENING WORD TO THE LEADER

Start here:

"If worship is about getting it right, then we're all in trouble."

This session turns the whole idea of worship upside down—or rather, right side up. We don't ascend to God. God descends to us. Worship is not a spiritual ladder. It's not our expression of devotion. It's not a weekly test of sincerity. It's where Christ shows up and says, *"I forgive you. I feed you. I send you."*

Invite participants to consider that maybe what feels ordinary in Lutheran worship is actually where the extraordinary mercy of God meets them—again and again.

CORE THEMES

1. Worship Is God's Action, Not Ours
Everything in our culture tells us to perform, produce, impress. So naturally, we bring those expectations into worship. But the gospel begins with a different truth: *God acts. We receive.*

- We don't come to "give God our best."
- We come to be given Christ.
- We don't climb up through praise.
- God comes down through Word and Sacrament.

"The highest worship of God is to receive the forgiveness of sins."

Let that settle into your group. Let it reshape everything.

2. The Shape of Worship Is the Shape of the Gospel
The pattern of worship is not an empty ritual. It follows the pattern of death and resurrection:

- **Confession** – not a show of sorrow, but an honest cry for help.
- **Absolution** – not encouragement, but *absolution*: the announcement that your sins are no more.
- **Word** – not advice, but *Christ* Himself speaking.
- **Supper** – not a symbol, but *His body and blood*, for you.
- **Sending** – not a motivational push, but freedom to live in mercy.

"The liturgy isn't old. It's anchored."

3. Word and Sacrament Are the Center of Gravity
God doesn't meet us in our enthusiasm. He meets us in what He's promised.

- **Preaching** – Christ is proclaimed.
- **Baptism** – God names and claims you.
- **Communion** – Christ puts forgiveness into your hands.

This is not symbolic theater. It's salvation delivered.

"If you want to find God, don't search your feelings. Find His promise."

4. Why Lutheran Worship Feels Ordinary—And Why That's the Point
No fog machines. No emotional build-up. No spiritual high. And that's not a failure. That's faithfulness. God hides Himself in plain things so He can reach plain people.

Because guess what? We're not always "feeling it." And if God's presence depends on your mood or sincerity, then you're in trouble.

"But if God's presence depends on His promise—then you're free."

5. Worship Trains Us in Receiving
Lutheran worship is repetitive on purpose. Not because we're lazy, but because we forget. Worship trains us—like breath, like heartbeat—to live in the rhythm of confession and absolution, death and life, sin and forgiveness.

We come to worship not to show our devotion, but to receive God's.

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- **Luke 19:10** – The Son of Man came *to seek and save.*
- **Isaiah 55:10–11** – God's Word does not return empty.
- **Romans 10:17** – Faith comes by hearing.
- **John 6:35** – Christ, the Bread of Life.
- **1 Corinthians 11:23–26** – Christ gives His body and blood.

Read these together. Ask: *What is God doing in each of these? Who is acting? Who is receiving?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have you felt pressure to "get something out of worship"? How does it change things to hear that worship is where God gives, not where you perform?

2. How does the simplicity of Word and Sacrament challenge our expectations about what God's presence should feel like?

3. What part of worship is most difficult for you to receive as a gift rather than an obligation? Why do you think that is?

4. Why do you think God chose such ordinary means—words, water, bread, wine—to deliver something as cosmic as forgiveness and eternal life?

CLOSING WORD TO THE LEADER

Reinforce this: It's all about the direction. "Worship is not the story of our devotion going up. It's the story of God's mercy coming down."

It's not about passion. It's about promise. God is not waiting to be discovered. He's already here—speaking, feeding, forgiving. Not because we get it right, but because Christ is always right... for us.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord of mercy,
You don't wait for us to climb. You come down.
You come in the Word, in the water, in the bread and wine.
You speak, and we are forgiven. You feed us, and we are made new.
Train our hearts to receive, our ears to hear,
and our lives to rest in Your promise:
You are here. You are for us. You are enough.
Amen.

Chapter Seven

A Living Hope

SESSION AIM

To help participants understand that Christian hope is not based on optimism, effort, or emotional strength, but on the historical, physical resurrection of Jesus Christ—and that this hope, already given in baptism, holds us through suffering, fear, and even death. This hope is not abstract. It is living, because Christ lives.

OPENING WORD TO THE LEADER

Start here:

"Hope doesn't begin when you get stronger. It begins when you can't hold it together anymore—and Christ already has."

This chapter is a pastoral invitation into the heart of the gospel—not as an idea to admire, but as a living hope that holds real people through real fear and real loss. Let participants name their uncertainty. Let them be honest about the limits of their strength. Then point them not to a plan, not to a mood, but to a risen Lord.

CORE THEMES

1. Hope Is Born in Mercy, Not Strength
We have not been born again because we made a decision or pulled it together spiritually. We were born again because *God acted*. In mercy. In Christ. In baptism.

- Hope isn't a reward.
- Hope isn't a feeling.
- Hope is the result of God's creative Word: "Let there be life."

"Hope didn't begin in your heart. It began in the empty tomb."

2. The Resurrection Is the Ground, Not the Goal
We are not hoping *for* resurrection someday—we are hoping *from* resurrection already accomplished. Christ's resurrection is not the finish line we're chasing. It's the starting line we've been given.

- That resurrection is real. Physical. Historical.
- And it's yours—not by achievement, but by promise.

"Our future isn't built on forecasts. It's anchored to a body that walked out of the grave."

3. An Inheritance You Can't Lose
Peter calls this hope an *inheritance*. That means it's not a wage. It's not a performance review. It's something secured for you—by God's power, not your grip.

- Yes, your faith may flicker.
- Yes, your trust may collapse.
- But the One who guards your hope never flickers, never collapses.

"It's not the size of your faith that secures your future. It's the strength of Christ's hold on you."

4. Hope Has a Cross in It
Christian hope isn't naïve. It doesn't avoid grief or deny suffering. It isn't incompatible with doubt or struggle. In fact, hope *survives* precisely because it's cruciform.

- This hope has scars.
- This hope has wept.
- This hope passed through death and still breathes.

"Hope doesn't erase the cross. It rises from it."

5. You Don't Know the Future—But You Know the One Who Does
Peter's original readers were scattered exiles, afraid and under pressure. They had no clarity about what came next. But Peter didn't give them a timeline. He gave them a promise: *"You have a living hope."*

- The same is true now.
- The world is uncertain. Churches are shrinking. Faith feels small.
- But Christ is risen—and He is not finished.

"Our hope isn't in what might happen. It's in what already has."

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- **1 Peter 1:3–5** – Living hope through resurrection
- **Ephesians 4:4** – One hope of your calling

- **Hebrews 11:1** – Faith as conviction of things not seen
- **John 11:25–26** – "I am the resurrection and the life."
- **Romans 6:4–5** – United with Christ in resurrection through baptism

Encourage participants to read 1 Peter 1 aloud slowly. Ask: *Where do you see mercy? Where do you see promise? Where do you see yourself?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is Christian hope different from wishing, positivity, or spiritual optimism?

2. What has challenged your hope in recent years? What sustained it?

3. How does it change your view of faith to hear that Christ—not your strength—is guarding your future?

4. Why is it good news that this inheritance is kept for you, not earned by you?

5. When have you experienced hope as something that survived grief—not avoided it?

CLOSING WORD TO THE LEADER

This session is less about clarity and more about confidence—not in ourselves, but in Christ.

"You may not know what's next. But you already know the end:

Christ lives. And because He lives, so shall you."

This is the last word—not just of this study, but of your life. And it's spoken by the One who has passed through death and still breathes hope into the grave.

CLOSING PRAYER

Risen Lord,
Our hope is not in our strength, our clarity, or our control.
It is in You—crucified, risen, and returning.
You have given us a future
not built on wishes but on wounds.
Hold us in that promise. Anchor us in Your mercy.
And when our faith flickers,
be the flame that does not go out.
Amen.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Mark Anderson was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mark's great-grandfather immigrated from Sweden and served as a Lutheran pastor until his retirement in the 1920's. Mark's father walked in his grandad's footsteps also serving as a Lutheran pastor and an Air Force chaplain.

During his father's active duty years as an Air Force chaplain, the family lived in Texas, Hawaii, and California. Mark's teenage years were spent in southern California during the rollicking sixties where he played in a band managed by the famous Disc Jockey Casey Kasem. He is an avid guitar and bass player and woodworker.

Pastor Mark graduated from Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota in 1973 with a double major in history and religion. His primary historical interest is in ancient history. He entered Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, completing his seminary internship in campus ministry under Pastor Carl Lee at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. Mark was ordained at Trinity Lutheran Church, Madison, Wisconsin by his father the Rev. Gen. Carroll Anderson, and Pastor Carl Lee in 1977.

During his 46 years in the parish ministry, Mark served both rural and urban congregations in Minnesota, Montana, and California. He also served for a time as an Air National Guard chaplain, with tours at Buckley Air Force Base, Denver, Colorado, and March Air Force Base, Riverside, California.

Mark and his wife Linda (his constant support, advocate, best friend, and by far the better half!) reside in Coto de Caza, California. They have enjoyed many travel adventures together with a definite preference for Italy! They have three children, Erik, Geoff (married to the adorable Jenn), and Kristin.

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GOD'S WORD IS LIFE

PROMOTING GOSPEL FREEDOM 15|21 SERVING THE NEIGHBOR