



A Bible Study from the LCMS Northern Illinois District

Incarnate Community Bible Study Leader's Guide
Session III Following Christ as the Community of Faith



Helping congregations be more centered on a rich life of Word and Sacrament,
with congregational support in transitions as well as time of joys and sorrows.



Northern Illinois District
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

2301 S. Wolf Road, Hillside, IL 60162

nidlcms.org

708-449-3020

Using Incarnate Community Leader's Guide

Welcome to Incarnate Community and thank you for your willingness to lead a group through this Northern Illinois District study. It is our prayer that our Lord will bless you and your group as you journey with us through this resource.

This leader's guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion of the materials with your group. In it, we've included the author's own responses to the questions with theological content to give you Pastor Kris' perspective on the questions your group will address in this study. Feel free to draw from this guide's content, making it your own, as you deem helpful for your group.

A few thoughts on your group:

- Ideally a small group consists of a leader and six to eight participants. This size allows for everyone to participate in discussion.
- The materials can be downloaded to a mobile device, printed for hard copy, or projected on screen.
- You may want to have a means of projecting the video portion of each session for ease of viewing and hearing for your entire group.
- Depending on the dynamic of your group's participation, you may not cover all the material in four one-hour sessions. If your group's goal is to work through the material in the course of four one-hour sessions, feel free to pick and choose sections and questions you think would be significant to your group and encourage participants to work through the remaining material on their own.
- It is the hope of your NID staff that many churches will participate together in this study during the Sundays of February 2022. If your group chooses to do this, you may wish to encourage them to then participate in the livestream discussion of the materials on our NID YouTube channel. (Go to the NID website at nidlcms.org to find the link.) This broadcast will feature President Buss and his panel of pastors and lay leaders who will go into more depth of discussion on each week's session.



Community Incarnate
Northern Illinois District Bible Study
Session III Following Christ as the Community of Faith
Leader's Guide

Focus Verse: *“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you’”* (John 20:21).

Welcome and Fellowship [15 – 30 minutes in a 90 minute time frame]

Opening Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, You sent Your Son, our Savior, Jesus, into the world. In His incarnate ministry, He brought the touch of Your compassion to the needy. He cared for the least and the downtrodden with Your love. He proclaimed the good news of Your kingdom come in Himself and gave the gift of forgiveness, ultimately accomplishing the salvation of the world by His sacrifice on the cross and His glorious resurrection! He sends us, as His Church, Your community of faith, into the world, as You sent Him. By Your Spirit, Lord, equip us with Your love, Your compassion, Your forgiving grace, and Your Holy Word, to proclaim the good news of what Christ has accomplished for us and for our neighbor. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Me and All My Members

We live in it ... move and have our being in it. ... In fact, we do not know ourselves apart from it. We are creatures endowed with our God-given bodies! The parts of our bodies do not live in some disconnected, isolated ways. You've likely not experienced your ear or one of your toes taking leave of your body, perhaps to take a break from being a part of you, and then choosing to come back and reattach to your body at some later point. Our body lives as a collective whole, down to each cell which through DNA is marked as uniquely you, and every part of the body works with the whole of our bodies to maintain the life and health of the whole. In I Corinthians 12:27 the Apostle Paul writes, *“Now you [plural] are the body of Christ and each individually members of it.”*

1. In what ways do you find Paul's identifying the Church as “the body of Christ” compelling or effective?
2. Why do you think he identifies us collectively and individually as members of the body of Christ?

NOTE: Encourage participants to share as they are comfortable. Answers will vary. In writing that we collectively are the body of Christ and each one a member of it, the Apostle Paul reveals that our Lord sees both an individual and corporate aspect to our life in the Church. Our relationship to Jesus is not merely, then, transactional, where He gives us grace, and we as individuals receive salvation or even respond in praise. Instead, our relationship to Jesus has application in the fact that He calls us and places us together with fellow believers. There is, by definition, a communal aspect to our being a member of the Body of Christ, His Church, which is ideally expressed in our in person participation in the life of the Church.

Video Segment [A three to five minute segment of one or two people discussing the blessing it has been to them personally when the entire church and/or a fellow Christian cared for them with Christ-like love.]

1. Share a way that you've been blessed by your community of faith.
2. How have you been a blessing to others by being part of your community of faith?

NOTE: Encourage participants to share their personal stories of receiving and giving blessings to the community of faith. Where fitting, you may want to draw attention to how those expressions of love and kindness were fulfilled in "in person" ways.

"Even so I am sending you ... "

Jesus is the image of the invisible God! [Colossians 1:15] He revealed His Father's perfect love for us, His perfect grace to us, His perfect plan of redemption of us, in His perfect life, death, and resurrection. Our Lord, in grace, goes even further. He also forms and fashions His Church and honors us to journey with Him, following Him as His new creation, in the joyful work of sharing His Good News.

John 20:19-23

1. How does John "set the scene" for Jesus' work among His disciples in this text? What might be the significance of noting that it is the "first day of the week"?

NOTE: In verse 19, John provides many details which help his readers “be in the room.” It is Easter evening, the day of victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. Yet, the disciples are still in a state of fear. They are afraid that the leaders of Israel and their followers might be emboldened with the death of Jesus to now begin to take measures against those who were closest to Him. So, they are in a room that is being kept secure, with doors locked. The locked doors are also a detail that highlights the miraculous way that Jesus shows up and stands among them, entering without an open way. The fact that John notes that it’s the “first day of the week” may allude to the belief that the day following God’s Sabbath at creation [the Sunday being the eighth day or the first day of the following week] was a sign of God’s sustaining love and grace. With creation completed, God would continue to provide what was needed for life to continue.

2. Why do you think Jesus connects revealing His hands and side with His Shalom greeting?

NOTE: The marks of Jesus’ crucifixion in His resurrected body are the signs that indeed the sacrifice to cover sins has been accomplished. The judgement of God for the followers of Jesus has been removed with His death. Now, as the risen Christ stands before His redeemed, there is truly peace, “Shalom,” with God for them. The Risen Christ’s wounds are a joyful sign for His followers.

3. What does it mean for Jesus to send His followers even as the Father sent Jesus?

NOTE: The Father had sent Jesus into His world to bring the gift of salvation. Jesus accomplished this mission through His sinless life, His sacrifice on the cross, and the victory of His resurrection. Now, the Lord readies His followers to likewise go with His sending to proclaim the Good News of salvation to the world. They, too, will be equipped with the gifts of God’s compassion, with His Holy Word, and with the Spirit to accomplish their mission of bringing Christ’s forgiveness to the lost for salvation.

4. What might be the significance of Jesus breathing on His followers?
[compare Genesis 2:7]

NOTE: When the Scriptures first note God breathing, He imparts life to Adam who becomes a living being. As Jesus breathes on His disciples, they receive the Spirit of God. Some have seen this as the act of our Lord, creating His Church in His image.

5. With Jesus’ breath, what great gift do His followers receive? In relationship with our neighbor, what great gift do we have to give to anyone?

NOTE: Jesus' followers receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will be given to them more fully at Pentecost, but even here, Jesus gives them the Spirit to sustain them for their mission. Jesus also imparts to His Church the authority to forgive sins. We can share this good news with anyone when they sin against us, and the Church imparts this gift to all the repentant through the Office of the Keys as pastors forgive the sins of the repentant in worship.

6. How does our service together as His people help to bring this gift to anyone?

NOTE: The Spirit gathers us around God's Word and Sacraments to receive His merciful gift of forgiveness. As we faithfully attend to these gifts of His grace and as we respond to Christ's grace through our gifts of stewardship, our Lord sustains the places where His Word is proclaimed and His sacraments are administered for the sake of others. Thus our coming together to receive Jesus' gift of forgiveness is used by our Lord to further bring others to this same gift.

Doing Likewise

As the Lord blesses us to follow Him as His redeemed people, He blesses us to do similarly to His own work as He has done in our lives. Discuss how this is played out in one of Jesus' most famous stories.

Luke 10:25-37

1. What is the lawyer's motive as this encounter with Jesus begins? What is his central question and what does it reveal about his own thoughts on eternity?

NOTE: It is significant to note that the lawyer seeks to put Jesus to the test. He does not approach the situation as a faithful follower of Jesus who is seeking His wisdom. Jesus, as our all-knowing Lord, is also aware that the lawyer is approaching Him to put Him to the test, so His responses are seen in that light. While his intentions are to put Jesus to the test, his question is one of central importance as it addressed the topic of eternal life. In the phrasing of his question (a question to which he already believes he knows the answer), the lawyer reveals his own orientation toward salvation as being one of works. He believes he must "do something" in order to inherit eternal life. The term inherit is interesting in his question, as more commonly, one doesn't do anything to inherit something. Rather, someone else dies and wills a person what he or she inherits.

2. To what does Jesus direct him and how does the lawyer further respond?

NOTE: Jesus directs the lawyer to God's Word, specifically the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) for the answer to his question. Dr. Just points out in his commentary on Luke that when Jesus further asks "How do you read it?" that Jesus is asking the lawyer how, when he is at synagogue or Temple, he publically teaches from those Scriptures that address his question. The lawyer's response makes reference to both Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

3. When Jesus states that if the lawyer loves both God and neighbor he will live [eternally], why do you think the lawyer asks only for clarification regarding love for the neighbor?

NOTE: Dr. Martin Luther wisely wrote that the 10 Commandments were divided into two tables. The first three commandments address our relationship to God, while the last seven address our relationship with our neighbor. The lawyer likely felt like there was no need for Jesus to add a qualifying statement on what it means to love God. He probably believed he could publically point to evidence that would rightly illustrate he had fulfilled the first commandment to love God. However, if he were to claim that he had perfectly fulfilled the second great commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (remember this conversation is likely played out in front of their community) there may be those in the crowd who could offer evidence to the contrary. However, if Jesus were to modify what was meant by "neighbor" in the Scriptures, it may leave the lawyer with the assurance that he had fulfilled what was needed to inherit eternal life while leaving some people "unloved" by him.

4. How does Jesus describe the man who fell among the robbers? Why is this description significant?

NOTE: Jesus does not leave His audience with any indications of whom this man is. In fact, he starts the description in the most generic way, "a certain man." As the man falls into the hands of the robbers, they leave him in a state where there is no way to distinguish who he is. He is stripped of his clothing, so you cannot tell what religious group or part of society he is from. He is beaten and left for dead, so you do not hear his voice so as to possibly catch an accent or dialect and determine what part of Israel is his home. The only thing possibly known of the man is that he is in need of mercy. This is significant not only because it sets up the rest of the story, it is also the image of how our Lord finds us, theologically speaking as we have been robbed and left for dead by sin. It also foreshadows the image of Jesus that He willingly takes for us on the cross, where He is stripped, beaten, and left for dead.

5. How do the religious leaders in the story act toward the man who fell among the robbers?

NOTE: For Jesus' first listeners to this story, the priest and the Levite would have been expected to be the heroes of the story. Yet, Jesus does not portray them as such. The priest is in the legal dilemma that if he draws near and comes in contact with a possibly dead body, he will be ceremonially unclean and, for a time, unable to fulfill his priestly duties at the Temple. Thus, in order to maintain his ability to demonstrate a "love for God," he chooses not to fulfill God's law to love his neighbor as himself and passes by on the other side. Jesus says that the Levite in the story "comes to the place" and sees the man. This may indicate that the Levite drew closer to the man, perhaps close enough to see he was still alive, and yet, like the priest, passes by on the other side of the road, doing nothing to tend to his neighbor's needs.

6. How does Jesus describe the response of the Samaritan?

NOTE: Jesus goes into great detail in accounting the compassionate response of the Samaritan. You may wish to note for your group that Jesus gives us the internal workings of the Samaritan when He says that he had compassion on the man. This means that the Samaritan was "moved at the gut" to do something about the man's situation. Pouring oil and wine on wounds was a medicinal practice in the first century AD. The Samaritan practices the fullest extent of love for one's neighbor for a man he does not know. After addressing his immediate medical needs, the Samaritan sets the man on his own animal [likely meaning the Samaritan then walked the journey], and took him to an inn where he himself took care of him for the night. The next day, he gives his own money to the inn keeper to continue to provide care for the man and assures the inn keeper that if the cost of caring for the man is greater than what he'd already given, when he returned from his journey, he would pay back in full the extra cost.

7. What is Jesus' final question to the lawyer? What is his response and Jesus' command?

NOTE: Jesus again answers the lawyer's second question, "And who is my neighbor?" with His own question, "Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer had sought to put Jesus to the test with his questions. Jesus, with his own questions, had drawn the lawyer into addressing what God truly means in His law to love Him and our neighbor as ourselves. The lawyer seems to not even be able to utter the term "Samaritan," but responds in general, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus' response is for the lawyer to "go and do likewise."

8. How do you believe the lawyer heard Jesus' story? In other words, if the lawyer were to cast himself in the story, with which person would he believe Jesus was directing him to identify?

NOTE: While we cannot project into the thought patterns of the lawyer completely, in the rhythm of Luke's account of this encounter, it would seem that the lawyer would have likely believed that Jesus was telling him that if he wanted to work for his eternal life, he needed to adopt the way of the Samaritan in the story and show perfect love for anyone who was in need as anyone in need, according to God's Law, is one's neighbor. As the lawyer knew that he did not love all people to this extent [hence his defining question, "Who is my neighbor?"], would likely have left him angry, in despair because he did not fulfill God's Law and thus had not done what is needed that he should have eternal life. Notice then, if we were to also project ourselves in the role of the Samaritan in the parable, we then place ourselves in the same role that the lawyer would also place himself.

9. As a follower of Jesus is there another way to hear the story? How does Jesus fulfill the Samaritan role in our lives?

NOTE: Rather than projecting ourselves into the role of the Samaritan in Jesus' parable, notice how the dynamic of hearing the story changes when we first see ourselves in the role of the man who fell among the robbers. The sinful world, our own sin, the power of Satan, and death itself might rightly be seen as our robbers. They strip us of the image of God in which God had created humanity, robbing us of the dignity of being holy, righteous creatures and leaving us for dead in our sin. Others may not want to get involved with us as those left for dead. Yet, Jesus, as our Good Samaritan, is moved by compassion to address our needs. He pours on the oil and wine of His merciful grace, binding up our wounds with His forgiving love. He takes us to the place where He further cares for our wounds, His Church, where He also resources His Church with what is needed to further care for His wounded until He returns. Jesus further fulfills the role of the One who cares for us by even taking our place as the one who fell among the robbers. The image of a man beaten, stripped, and left for dead bears a striking resemblance to how Jesus Himself might be described on the cross.

10. If Jesus is in the Samaritan's role, with whom else might we identify in the story?

NOTE: As Jesus cares for and rescues us with His grace, playing a role similar to the Good Samaritan in His story as our Savior, now, having been forgiven and rescued by His grace, we might rightly see ourselves in the story as those who tend to the Inn where Jesus brings His wounded. We might also see ourselves in the role of the Samaritan's own beast where Jesus, in seeking out other wounded people [our neighbors] who are in need of His love, brings us along on the journey and places His wounded upon us, using us to carry them along back to the place where He cares for us all in the local congregation.

11. How does seeing Jesus as the Samaritan move us to “go and do likewise” in our lives?

NOTE: Jesus came right to where His lost world is. He took on human flesh and, incarnate, brought His touch of compassion into the lives of those who need God's mercy. As we receive His mercy, our Lord empowers us by His grace to “go and do likewise,” to go, in the flesh, and bring the touch of Jesus' compassion to others, and bring them the rescue of His Gospel!

Final Thought

As Jesus brings us into a relationship with Him, in turn, He brings us into relationship with others in His fallen, yet loved and redeemed by Him world. His purpose is merciful. He has had compassion on us and freely given us the gifts of His grace where He forgives, creates in us living faith, and begins to fashion us in His own image. Yet, our Lord is a journeyman on the move. He continues to seek out the wounded of His world who've been left for dead by the robbers of sin, death, and Satan. In love, He brings us along and gives us a heart for our fellow wounded. He also gives us a place, the local gathering of fellow followers of Jesus ... in the parable it was called the Inn, we more commonly call it the congregation ... where He brings the fellow wounded, along with us ... often by means of us ... to care for our every need! And if it costs us fellow “inn keepers” more than we think Jesus has provided, when He returns, He will pay us back in full!

