

Introduction

Welcome

from David Lose, author of *Making Sense of Scripture: Big Questions about the Book of Faith*

I am both pleased and grateful that you've offered your time and energy to serve as a leader for this study. The role you will play in helping others to better understand and enjoy the Bible is significant. I know that it takes both effort and commitment to lead a class like this effectively, and I appreciate that you've offered to do that.

In order to help you in the role you've accepted, this Introduction to the Leader Guide will do three things:

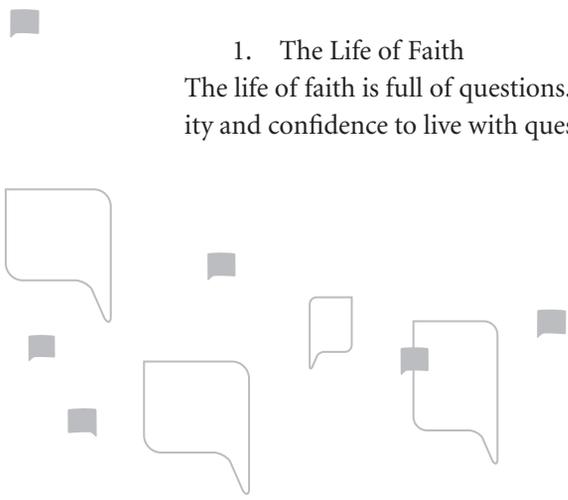
- Share the foundational convictions of *Making Sense of Scripture* and this course;
- Go over the pattern of the Leader Guide and review the session components;
- Offer some advice on how to effectively lead this study

Sometimes when we are invited into leadership roles, we wonder if we are adequately prepared. I want to assure you from the outset that the primary requirements for leading this course are a curious and open mind, a desire to welcome others into a conversation about Scripture, and a willingness to learn from the other participants in the class. You do not need great experience with the Bible to lead this course, and you should never feel you need answers to all the questions that arise. You are as much a learner as the other participants. In fact, you may very well find you learn even more because of your additional preparation. I regularly find this to be true in my own teaching.

I hope and expect that leading these sessions will be a rewarding experience for you. I know already that others will benefit from your effort. Please accept my thanks in advance for this.

Convictions

I have two particular convictions about the life of faith and the Bible. They deeply shape both the content and the structure of *Making Sense of Scripture* and this study course.



1. The Life of Faith

The life of faith is full of questions. Faith is definitely not about having all the answers, but having the curiosity and confidence to live with questions. We may well discover, in fact, that as we learn about God, we become



aware of how much more there is to know. So it's very important to remember that questions, confusion, and even doubt are not marks of a lack of faith. Rather, they witness to a faith that is seeking to know and understand better. Throughout the book and course, we will emphasize how important it is to voice our "faithful questions" in order to understand the Bible and the God to which it witnesses more deeply.

2. The Bible

I believe the Bible is best understood as a collection of different confessions of faith. These confessions take many different shapes and sizes—some are stories while others are songs; some are legal codes and others genealogies; some are instructions for rituals while others are romantic poetry. What binds these confessions together is that all of them were offered by persons so gripped by an experience of God that they had to tell others. Together, these confessions of faith tell the story of God and God's people. As anyone who opens a Bible soon discovers, however, it is not the same kind of story you find in a novel with a neat beginning, middle, and end. Rather, the Bible is more like the story that emerges from a family scrapbook, filled with bits and pieces of a family's history over the generations.

THE BIBLE "STORY"

All human beings are very familiar with stories. We tell them for enjoyment. We tell them to share the ordinary events of everyday life with those around us. We tell them to convey our deepest beliefs about ourselves and the world. For this reason, we will engage the Bible through paying close attention to its "story." What story do we hear emerging in the passages we read? How does this story connect with our own story? These kinds of questions will enliven this Bible study.

Taken together, these two convictions about *faith* and the *Bible*, and about *questions* and *story*, will be central elements to the content of *Making Sense of Scripture*. They also shape the book's format, which is written as a conversation between two people asking and answering questions. As they talk together they try to make sense of the biblical story, often by sharing pieces of their own story. Similarly, the course sessions involve a lot of questions and a lot of storytelling. My hope and intention is that through this kind of reading and study we will see more clearly how God's story and ours connect.

Overview of the Leader Guide and Session Components

Now let's walk through the structure of the Leader Guide and discuss each component that makes up a session.

PREPARE

The Prepare section is designed to help you get ready for each session. Here you will find the following elements:

- **Focus Statement**—Summarizes the key learning point of the session. This can serve as a compass point to keep you oriented toward the main idea of the chapter and session.
- **Chapter Overview**—Recaps the chapter from *Making Sense of Scripture* that the session will explore. This is for your review. You may, however, use this as a starting point to outline the key concepts for participants, particularly if you decide not to use the accompanying DVD introduction to the session.

- ***Before You Begin***—Offers some questions for you to think about as you prepare to meet with participants.
- ***Session Instructions***—Provides a list of key things to keep in mind as you prepare to lead the session.
- ***Facilitator's Prayer***—Presents a way to center yourself and prepare for the role you will play. It is the same each week, and you are encouraged to take confidence from its familiarity as well as adapt it to your needs.

Throughout the session, you will also find teaching Tips and Supplies in the sidebar. These are helpful hints based on the material to be covered. Take time to look at these items as you prepare to lead. They provide helpful hints and additional ways to approach the session time.

GATHER

The Gather time includes three essential elements:

- ***Welcome and Check-in***—Focuses on building relationships and trust so the community feels comfortable asking and addressing challenging questions. We do not learn well unless other, more basic, needs are met. One of the most basic needs participants will have is to feel welcome and accepted. By spending a few moments each week to check in, you will greatly strengthen the level of trust participants have for each other.
- ***Opening Prayer***—Offers each participant the chance to be still and centered as they become open to God's Word. Each session has a different prayer written with the subject material of that session in mind. Feel free to read it aloud or adapt it. You might also use this time to invite participants from the group to share prayer requests or offer prayers.
- ***Insights and Questions (IQ) Time***—Gives participants a chance to articulate, and therefore “own,” what they are learning (which is why this is one of the most important parts of the session). This time also helps participants focus their questions. We tend to think of an IQ test as a measure of what we *already know*, but in this class the IQ section measures something far more important: what we are *currently learning*. Participants may be surprised by how powerful it is to name the new insights they have achieved and to listen to and learn from the insights of others. Sometimes participants will be able to answer each other's questions—adding to their confidence in handling the Bible. Sometimes their questions will serve to focus the conversation ahead. Either way, collecting these insights and questions upfront will be a helpful habit to develop. At the end of each session, participants will revisit their IQs in light of the discussion and study they've just experienced.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

In this section, participants will engage the central concepts and ideas of the chapter they've read in three ways.

- **Video Introduction**—Provides a summary of the chapter and an overview of the exercises and Bible study to come. If you choose not to show this, you will probably want to summarize the chapter concepts, drawing from the Chapter Overview (in the Prepare section).
- **Conversation Starters**—Focuses on two quotations directly from *Making Sense of Scripture* that capture the main ideas of each chapter. These quotations are followed by several questions designed to elicit initial conversation about the topic at hand.
- **Activity**—Gives participants a chance to put the concepts into practice, usually while working together in small groups. Here, some of the conceptual learning takes a deeper, more experiential “hold” of the participants. Many sessions also offer a Bonus Activity that can be used in addition to or instead of the main activity, depending upon your group's needs and the amount of time you have for the class session.

OPEN SCRIPTURE

Having “practiced” the concepts of the chapter during the Activity, this section engages participants in exploring Bible texts to support the key concepts of the session.

- **Bible Text**—Engages participants in Scripture using the new ideas and tools they developed during Join the Conversation. Through discussion and activities, participants deepen their understanding not only of a biblical passage, but also of the main idea or skill covered in the chapter. Most sessions have a Bonus Activity with suggestions for exploring additional Bible passages.

EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION

- **Looking Back**—Revisits the notes from “IQ” (Insights & Questions) Time collected at the beginning of the session. This is usually a good opportunity to affirm what has been learned and sometimes to sharpen questions that the participants will want to keep in mind going forward.
- **Looking Ahead**—Previews the subject to be covered in the next chapter and session. You can share the brief instructions provided to “prime the pump” before participants read the next chapter and prepare for the next session.

REPRODUCIBLE SESSION HANDOUTS

These are provided to you for each session in case you want the learners to have the questions that accompany the activities of the study (Join the Conversation and Open Scripture). They also include the assignment for the upcoming session.

MAKE THE COURSE YOUR OWN

While the Conversation Starters, Activities, Bible Passages, and Bonus Activities are designed to reinforce and build on each other, please feel free to tailor or adapt these pieces to fit the needs and goals of your group. For example, you may anticipate spending extra time on a particular Activity and decide to spend less time on the Bible Passage

that week, or vice versa. The Leader Guide sessions are just that—guides with information and suggestions to equip you to lead and facilitate each week’s study. You are and remain the leader of this study, and you can and should exercise your discretion in how to use the material provided. So after reading the Leader Guide, feel free to make this course your own.

Advice and Counsel

You have everything you need to lead this course of study effectively. By reading through the book chapter and Leader Guide ahead of time and doing some minimal preparation you can be confident that you will facilitate a rewarding and enjoyable learning session for your participants. Even so, here are several suggestions for enhancing that experience.

- ***Making Sense of Scripture*** is the main resource for each of the participants. The material in your Leader Guide is provided only to you. It will help you summarize key points in the book, but the class session will be enhanced if participants read from and engage the material directly from their books.
- ***Questions are central to this course.*** Throughout the course, remind people that there are no dumb questions, that we learn from the questions asked by ourselves and others, and that questions are the mark of a curious and eager mind. You all have a great deal to teach and learn from each other; reminding participants of your confidence in this will help develop trust and support among the group.
- ***Don’t be afraid of silence.*** The silence that comes immediately after you ask a question can be one of the most difficult things about leading a study. As the leader, you have been able to think through the questions ahead of time. Participants, however, may be encountering these questions for the first time. During the silence, they are formulating their answers, and what seems like a very long time to you probably does not seem that long to the participants. So allow the silences to be “holy times” of contemplation rather than feeling the need to fill the quiet moments.
- ***Pay attention to building relationships.*** As important as the session material may be, the relationships you are developing with each other as you explore Scripture are even more important. Always make room for catching up and checking in with each other, and always allow time and space for people to share their thoughts, questions, insights, and concerns. The time you spend in conversation and prayer will always be time well spent.
- ***The Bible often produces strong emotions in people.*** Even those who have not read a Bible in years may be surprised at how strong their opinions about the Bible are. Don’t be caught off guard if people in your group disagree about various aspects of the Bible or about the concepts in this course. For instance, participants may have very different, though equally strong, opinions about how we talk about the Bible being “true.” Others may wonder whether “story” is a sufficient way to describe and engage Scripture. You might hear a question like, “Are you saying the Bible is just a story?”

When these emotions or sentiments are expressed, try not to be defensive. Rather, consider the following steps in replying to a difficult or impassioned question:

1. Honor the questioner by listening carefully to the question. You may want to try to reflect back what you are hearing to make sure you understand the participant correctly.
2. Acknowledge the validity of the question.
3. Remind all participants that intelligent and faithful people can and will disagree with each other from time to time on these kinds of issues. Such disagreements do not signal a lack of faith.
4. With the permission of the questioner, turn the question over to the larger group for discussion so all participants have an opportunity to share their insights and similar questions.
5. Work to maintain a level of respect and consideration for each other, rooted in a shared faith in the God we know through Jesus. Remember that this is more important than “resolving” differences.

A FINAL WORD

I am very excited for what you will learn by leading and facilitating this group, and I am grateful for the service you are rendering your co-learners. Thank you for your time, effort, and good faith. Even more, thank God for you.

David Lose, author
Making Sense of Scripture

About the Book of Faith Initiative

Welcome to the Book of Faith! The Book of Faith initiative invites 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. This is an initiative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

THE BIBLE IS A BOOK OF FAITH

The Bible is the written Word of God that creates and nurtures faith through the work of the Holy Spirit and points us to Christ, the incarnate Word and center of our faith. The Bible invites us into a relationship with God, making demands on our lives and promising us life in Christ. The Bible tells the stories of people living their faith over the centuries and, through its demands and promises, forms us as a people of faith.

THE LANGUAGE OF SCRIPTURE IS OUR FIRST LANGUAGE OF FAITH

The language of the Bible becomes our language. It shapes how we think and speak about God, about the world, and about ourselves. We become renewed, enlivened, and empowered as the language of Scripture forms our hearts, our minds, our community conversation, and our commitments.

WE HAVE CALLING AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Part of our calling is to know, hear, share, and be rooted in Scripture. We are renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.

As we live into our calling as people who are formed by Scripture, we become renewed in our faith, enlivened through the Spirit, and empowered through the cross of Christ to serve God and neighbor. Find out more at www.bookoffaith.org.

Session Schedules and Variations

The *Making Sense of Scripture* course is flexible to fit a variety of settings and timeframes. Use the following charts to guide your session planning. *Making Sense of Scripture* contains many rich theological concepts and opportunities for exploration and discussion. As you review the session materials, you may want to consider extending this course so the group can engage in deeper conversations with each other and with the Bible.

We include the times for a 60-minute session in our session discussions that follow. Depending on your desired emphasis, you may want to adjust the times given to each part of the session.

	45 MINUTES	60 MINUTES	90 MINUTES	120 MINUTES
GATHER	5	10	15	15
JOIN THE CONVERSATION	20	20	35	50
OPEN SCRIPTURE	15	20	30	45
EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION	5	10	10	10

Using a Retreat Format

Consider a retreat option if you want time to focus on *Making Sense of Scripture*. You might even consider using this as a leadership retreat for your council and other congregational leaders. If you do plan to do the course in a retreat setting, you will greatly benefit by having the participants read the book *Making Sense of Scripture* before the retreat begins. Order copies and hand them out to retreat participants at least two weeks in advance if possible.

If you use this course in a retreat setting, you may want to meet one or more times after the retreat to continue your conversations.

Day 1: Friday

5:30 P.M.	SUPPER
6:30–8:00 P.M.	SESSION 1
8:00–8:10 P.M.	BREAK
8:10–9:40 P.M.	SESSION 2

Day 2: Saturday

7:30 A.M.	BREAKFAST
8:45–10:15 A.M.	SESSION 3
10:15–10:25 A.M.	BREAK
10:25–11:55 A.M.	SESSION 4
NOON–1:00 P.M.	LUNCH
1:00–2:30 P.M.	SESSION 5
2:30–2:40 P.M.	BREAK
2:40–4:10 P.M.	SESSION 6
4:10–4:25 P.M.	BREAK
4:25–5:55 P.M.	SESSION 7
6:00–7:00 P.M.	SUPPER
7:15–7:30 P.M.	CLOSING PRAYER AND DEPARTURE

Invitation Letter

Dear _____ ,

A group of us will be gathering soon to begin an exciting study called *Making Sense of Scripture: Big Questions about the Book of Faith*. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we do want to share what the Bible means to us and how it may be able to speak to our lives.

Some in this group may have spent a good deal of time with the Bible. Most of us haven't read it as much as we might like. But together we hope to come to it anew, as if opening this book for the first time. I would be very pleased if you could join us.

We will gather on _____ at _____ .
[day and date] [location]

We are meeting at _____ , and will plan to meet for about _____ minutes.
[time]

Copies of the book used in the study are available in the church office. If you plan to join us, you will find it very helpful to have read the Introduction and first chapter of the book. But even if you haven't read the book ahead of time, come anyway.

It should be a very relaxed first gathering. I'll call you in the next few days to see if you have any questions.

Talk to you soon!

In Christ,