

# CONTENTS

Introduction	5
<hr/>	
<b>1</b> Who Is Jesus—Really? <i>1 John 1:1—2:2</i>	9
<hr/>	
<b>2</b> Who Are We—Really? <i>1 John 2:29—3:24</i>	19
<hr/>	
<b>3</b> How Can We Love—Really? <i>1 John 4:1-21</i>	31
<hr/>	
<b>4</b> How Can We Live—Really? <i>1 John 5:1-13</i>	43
<hr/>	

# Introduction

## Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

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

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

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

## A Session Overview

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

### • Gather (10-15 minutes)

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

### • Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

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

### • Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

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

### • Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

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

## A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

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

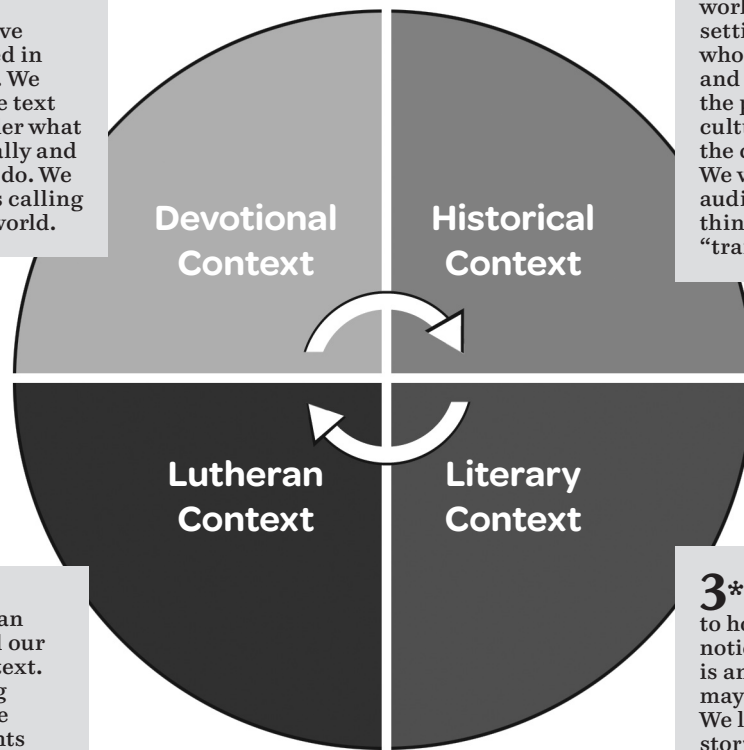
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

## The Learner Session Guide

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

For those subscribing to the Web version of Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the Learner Session Guides will be downloaded and printed in preparation for the session, or they may simply be projected for groups that decide to be paperless.

## The Leader Session Guide

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

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

- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.
- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

## Session Prep Video

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

## Leader and Learner

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

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

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

## Books of Faith Series

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies includes several series and courses. This 1 John unit is part of the Books of Faith Series, which is designed to explore key themes and texts in the books of the Bible. Each book of the Bible reveals a unique story or message of faith. Many core themes, story lines, and characters are shared by several books, but each book in its own right is a book of faith. Exploring these books of faith in depth opens us to the variety and richness of God's written word for us.

### 1 John Unit Overview

The epistle (letter) of 1 John is not really a letter. It is more like a sermon or a testimony expressing the truth of what the writer believes about who Jesus is and how that defines who we are. 1 John is a book of comfort and challenge. It comforts us with the reminder that we are children of God. It challenges us to make our faith genuine by expressing in our lives what we believe in our hearts. As we daily live in the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus, sharing his love with one another, our faith becomes real and we experience what it means to “abide in him.”

This four-session course explores 1 John through four key questions:

Session 1 (1 John 1:1–2:2) asks, “Who Is Jesus—Really?” To opponents who denied Jesus was God

in the flesh and who sought to live only on a spiritual plane, 1 John provides a clear response. Jesus is God's Son. He came in the flesh and died to forgive our sins and the sins of the whole world. Those who believe are called to walk in the light of God's love.

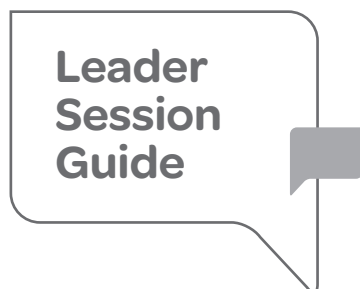
Session 2 (1 John 2:29–3:24) asks, “Who Are We—Really?” The answer turns once again to the relationship between God and Jesus the Son. Our identity comes from God's love, in which we are called God's children. Though sin seeks to pull God's children into lawlessness, the children of God live out their new identity by loving in truth and action.

Session 3 (1 John 4:1-21) asks, “How Can We Love—Really?” Again, the answer is relational. Our love for others flows from God's love for us in Christ Jesus. Christ's love frees us for a life lived in loving service to others. Because we are justified by God's grace, we live not in fear but in hope-filled faith. In the promise of faith we are able to love because God first loved us (4:19).

Session 4 (1 John 5:1-13) asks, “How Can We Live—Really?” The water of Baptism, the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, and the gift of the Holy Spirit continue to testify to the relationship we have with God in Jesus. Because we are born of God, we live and serve in this world by faith and are assured that we will live eternally.

## SESSION ONE

### 1 John 1:1—2:2



#### Focus Statement

When we discover who Jesus is, we better understand who we are.



#### Key Verse

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:1-2



#### Focus Image



Crucifixion of Jesus, painting detail. Saint Joseph Patron Church, Brooklyn, NY. © age fotostock / SuperStock

## Who Is Jesus—Really?

### Session Preparation

#### Before You Begin . . .

Take a moment to reflect on the key question of the session: Who is Jesus—really? How have you known and been known by Jesus? Reflect on your own faith walk with Jesus. How have you experienced walking in the darkness of sin and in the light of Christ's forgiveness? How does your walk affect your relationships with those around you? What in your own life do you need to confess to God, asking for God's cleansing and forgiveness?

#### Session Instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video.
2. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note also any bonus activities you wish to do.
3. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you'll need, if any.
4. Keep in mind the conversational nature of Book of Faith adult Bible studies. Your role is to facilitate the conversation so that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

#### Session Overview

As this is the first session based on the letter of 1 John, it is helpful to start with some general background about the book. Though 1 John is called a letter, it doesn't have the standard greeting or closing we expect to find in a letter. It jumps right into its message. And as we read, we discover that the letter is written to deal with certain questions, including "Who is Jesus—really?" In the very first verses of the letter, the writer wants to emphasize that he and others have actually seen and touched Jesus. Your group will wonder together about why the writer seems to be so concerned with who Jesus is and what he has done. Discovering who Jesus is and why he has come leads us to discover who we are and why we need him.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It appears that different answers to the question of Jesus' identity were making the rounds in the Christian community. The writer identifies people "who went from us" who have been denying that Jesus is the Christ (2:18-27) and who may also have been teaching that Jesus did not really come in the flesh (4:1-3). So who were





### Gnostic/Gnosticism:

This form of Greek philosophy resented a dualistic worldview in which humans were trapped inside an evil physical realm, only capable of escape into the good spiritual realm through specially revealed knowledge (in Greek, *gnosis*).

these false ones, and what were they saying about Jesus? The exact nature of their teaching is not certain, but most scholars believe that the false ones were teaching a form of Gnostic thought known as Docetism, a teaching that comes from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning “to seem” or “to appear.” The false ones in 1 John may have argued that Jesus was a spiritual being who only seemed or appeared to be human.

In Greek thinking, the spiritual world was considered to be separate from the material world. Some went so far as to say the material world, including human flesh, was corrupt, while the spiritual world was pure. To gain salvation, a person had to escape from the prison of this world into the life of the supernatural world. The Docetists would have found it hard to imagine that God could be contained in finite human form, so Jesus could not really be God in a real person, in the flesh. The human Jesus, they may have argued, wasn’t the same as the divine or spiritual Jesus, and his death had no value for salvation. Your group will be introduced to the heresy of Docetism and reflect on whether they think this controversy may be influencing the writer and the community of 1 John. You may explore further how this and other controversies led to the church’s creedal statements, such as the Nicene Creed.

### LITERARY CONTEXT

Your group will take another look at the text to note how the writer focuses on human senses and the physical experience of knowing Jesus. We have heard, seen, touched, and looked at the Son. And the intimate physical relationship (fellowship) the writer and other believers share with God through Jesus Christ is also shared with each other.

Your group will also explore the images of darkness and light that are so prominent in 1:5-10. God is light and has no darkness. Those who walk in the light remain in fellowship with God and with other followers, but the writer makes it clear that all (even Jesus’ followers) walk in darkness. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1:8). So, how can we be children of light and remain in darkness at the same time? The group will explore what this may mean.

### LUTHERAN CONTEXT

With the help of Lutheran interpretive principles, you will take another look at today’s text. In declaring the truth about who Jesus is, the writer of 1 John clearly draws inspiration from the Gospel of John. Using the Lutheran principle of “Scripture

interprets Scripture,” your group will explore John 1:1-18 and some additional texts. The learners are likely to discover that the beginning of 1 John (1:1-4) is similar to the prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18). In fact, the language and style and some of the ideas in 1 John are similar to those found in the Gospel. For example, learners may notice in the prologue to John’s Gospel that the focus is on the Word who was with God and who was God (1:1). Through this Word comes life, which was the light of all people (1:4). But that’s not all. This Word “became flesh and lived among us” (1:14). From this Word we have all received grace upon grace (1:16). The Word is Jesus Christ, who makes known the Father’s very heart to humanity. The texts from Galatians and Romans will be used to help illustrate a second Lutheran principle: Scripture points to Christ. These passages support the message of 1 John that points to the fact that Jesus is God in the flesh and that he died to **atone** for our sins and the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). What a remarkable message—that God would become flesh and die for the sins of the whole world. No wonder some can’t believe it. No wonder some try to come up with different theories to make Jesus fit their worldview.

Lutherans share with other Christians this important confession of faith. And this leads to the important theological view of human nature that we are sinful and in need of God’s gracious forgiveness. Luther’s view that we are *simul justis et peccator* (simultaneously saint and sinner) will be explored. Whether we confess our sins in private prayer or in the formal setting of Confession and Absolution in worship, we live out this *simul*-ness. We freely admit that we cannot save ourselves from our state of sin. We rejoice that God acted to save us purely by grace by sending the Son in the flesh to forgive. We are “saints” not because of what we do, but because God declares us to be saints through Jesus Christ.

#### DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

Who is Jesus—really? Jesus is God in the flesh. Jesus reveals the Father’s gracious and loving heart by coming to die and to forgive sins. Only a few disciples actually saw and heard and touched Jesus. We give thanks for their witness. But this does not mean that Jesus is only a spiritual memory. He continues to come to us in many ways. The group will talk about how they have experienced Jesus—touched and been touched by him. They may speak of comfort in times of need or they may identify the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as a place where Jesus is present for them in the bread and wine and through the promise of the words: “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” If

#### ? Atone/Atonement:

The word *atone* means “to make up for a misdeed” or to “make payment for a sin or misdeed.” Jesus’ death on the cross is described in 1 John 2:2 and elsewhere as an “atoning sacrifice for our sins.” One way of describing Jesus’ atonement is that his death makes payment to God for our sins. Another is that Jesus dies to defeat death and sin. Still another way of talking about atonement is that God cared enough, loved us so much, that God was willing to die to save us. A simple memory device also helps us understand this term. Through Jesus’ death, humanity is once again “at-one” with God.



## SESSION ONE

we weren't in need of a Savior, his coming was unnecessary. So, we recognize we are indeed sinful. We cannot suddenly erase it from our lives. We cannot measure up to God's perfection. We need only confess this is true and turn in faith to the Word made flesh, who gave his life as the ultimate loving sacrifice. From that ultimate love we draw strength to "walk in the light," to truly love one another.

### Facilitator's Prayer

Spend time in prayer for your learners as well as for the session ahead.

*Here I am, Lord. Touch my lips that I might speak your word. Give me patience to listen, boldness to question, courage to challenge, faith to love, strength to endure, and grace to forgive both myself and others, that in my teaching and in my living, others might see you in me. Continue to speak to me as I teach, even after I say "amen," that this time together might be your time. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



#### Tip:

Create a welcoming environment at the beginning of the unit to set the tone for all of the sessions. Consider wearing nametags if any learners are new to your group or congregation or if participants could benefit from visual reminders of one another's names.



#### Tip:

Invite participants to pray the opening prayer together out loud as a group.



#### Tip:

Provide paper and pens or pencils to the learners. As time allows, capture responses on whiteboard or chart paper.

## Gather (10-15 minutes)

### Check-in

Welcome the group and make sure that all know one another. If you are continuing from another unit of study, you may need some time to debrief any homework assignments. You may wish to have group members answer the question "What led you to join this conversation with 1 John?"

### Pray

*Gracious God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus to meet us just as we are. Loving God, send down your Holy Spirit on us as we gather to hear your Word of life. Open our eyes to see you. Open our ears to hear you. Open our hands to touch you. Open our hearts to love you. Open our lives to walk in the light of your Son Jesus. Amen.*

### Focus Activity

Look at the title of this session. In one minute or less, write down any one-word answers to the question "**Who is Jesus?**"

## Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

Read 1 John 1:1—2:2.

For this reading of the text, consider darkening the room and have someone read the text by the light of by a small flashlight or candle.

OR

Invite someone who is visually impaired to read 1 John 1:1—2:2 from a Braille text, invite someone to interpret the text in American Sign Language (ASL), or have the text read from Braille and interpreted in ASL at the same time!

Ask learners to reflect on the following questions after reading or listening to the session texts.

- What words or phrases in the text touched you?
- What images stood out?
- What questions were raised?

## Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

### Historical Context

1. The writer of 1 John was very concerned about choosing just the right words for his letter. And it's amazing to think that a letter written so long ago is so packed with meaning. Though we don't know exactly who the writer of 1 John was, the message of the letter makes it clear he was trying to speak about what he believed was true and essential.

- As you explore today's text again, identify the thing that the writer seems to say is true and essential.
- Imagine the writer's intended readers. How do you picture them as they read the opening chapter of the letter for the first time?

2. You may have already discovered that the writer wanted to say something about Jesus. What may not be so clear in this first chapter is that the letter was likely written in response to false teaching that was threatening the community of faith. The writer needed to clear up some things. Not everything that everyone in the community was saying about Jesus was true.



### Tip:

If using candles, at least two or three candles will probably be necessary to provide enough light for reading. Be sure that melted wax will not damage the tabletop or covering, and follow all local fire codes and your congregation's fire policies regarding the use of open flames.



### Tip:

Plan ahead. This may take some searching.



### Tip:

Encourage imagination here. An exact answer to authorship is only an educated guess. Let what is being said in the text guide the ideas from the group.



### Bonus Activity:

Compare the opening four verses of 1 John to other New Testament letters, such as Romans 1:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 1:1-11. Have learners note differences. Talk about the role letter writing has played throughout history. What do we miss today with letter writing on the decrease?

## SESSION ONE



### Tip:

As you prepare for this session, you may want to research key terms and concepts such as Gnosticism, Docetism, and heresies, both ancient and modern.



### Bonus Activity:

Ask learners to list some modern-day teachings or practices that might be considered heresy to Christians.

Some false teachers may have been following a Greek teaching known as Docetism (from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning “to seem” or “to appear.”) Docetism included these beliefs:

- The spiritual world was considered to be separate from the material world.
- The material world, including human flesh, was corrupt, while the spiritual world was pure.
- Salvation is gained by escaping from the prison of this world into the supernatural world.
- The infinite or divine cannot be contained in finite or human form.
- God, being holy and infinite, would not become human and could not suffer or die.

After reviewing 1 John 1:1—2:2, mark an X on the continuum line where you think the writer places Jesus’ nature. Then write a D where you think a Docetist would mark the continuum. Think carefully, the answer is a bit tricky.

Jesus is only  
human

Jesus is both  
human and divine

Jesus is only  
divine



3. To those who followed Docetic thinking, the human Jesus wasn’t the same as the divine or spiritual Jesus, so his death had no value for salvation. How does that line of thinking seem to differ with the message of 1 John 1:1—2:2? What words and images in John’s letter seem to address the claims of Docetism?

### Literary Context

1. The Bible is made up of different kinds of writings, including stories, songs, pieces used in worship, and letters. Although 1 John is typically referred to as a letter (or epistle), it doesn’t have a formal greeting, salutation, or closing. First John is structured more like a sermon or essay designed to correct and teach God’s people.

- Read 1 John 1:1-4 again. In your own words, why was 1 John written?

2. Look again at today’s reading. List the words that have to do with human senses, human physical attributes, and human nature. List the words that have to do with Jesus. Compare the lists.

- What words describe Jesus’ humanity?
- What words describe his divine nature?

3. Notice how the writer also makes use of images of darkness and light. What do you think it means to “walk in the light” or to be “walking in darkness”?

### Lutheran Context

1. Let’s look at two Lutheran principles to explore today’s text further. We use “Scripture to interpret Scripture.” Passages in one part of the Bible shed light on the meaning of other passages. And we look for how “Scripture points us to Christ.” Form three groups, one group per passage. Look up your group’s passage and respond to the questions. Share your ideas.

John 1:1-18

Galatians 2:19-21

Romans 6:1-14

- How do these texts support the message of 1 John 1:1—2:2?
- In your own words, can you explain how the passage you looked up reveals who Jesus is—really?

2. In *Opening the Book of Faith*, Mark Allan Powell states: “The *law* is that which accuses us and judges; the *gospel* is that which comforts and saves us. This message of law and gospel is at the heart of Scripture: faithful interpretation discerns this message; faithful proclamation declares this message” (Augsburg Fortress, p. 29). With this definition in mind, describe the interplay of *law* and *gospel* in 1 John 1:1—2:2.

- How do the two work together to lead the reader to Christ?
- With one or two others, discuss the following two questions:  
What do you hear the *law* speaking to you through this text?  
What do you hear the *gospel* speaking to you through this text?

3. Note the definition in the margin. It was a key to Martin Luther’s understanding of human nature.

Luther spoke of all baptized Christians being saints, because in baptism we are made children of God’s promise and connected to the life and death of Jesus (see Romans 6:1-4). We are saints also because we are made right with God through Christ who forgives sins. At the same time, we continue to be sinful.

- Look again at 1 John 1:8—2:2. How do these verses seem to reflect what Luther said about being saints and sinners at the same time?

### + Bonus Activity:

Look at the themes of light and darkness in a story in the Gospel of John. Ask for three volunteers to read John 3:1-21 aloud. Then discuss these questions: How does this story show the difference between walking in darkness and walking in light? Why is it significant that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night?

### + Bonus Activity:

Both the author of 1 John and the author of the Gospel of John weave throughout their texts the images of darkness and light. Using a concordance, identify other passages in Scripture that make use of this image. Describe how the image is used and how the image functions to point to the saving message of God’s grace in Jesus.

### Tip:

Discussion can take place in small groups. If time allows have small groups share discoveries with the whole group.

### + Bonus Activity:

Provide copies of several Lutheran worship books. Compare and contrast the various Orders of Confession and Forgiveness used in each. How have the orders changed? How have they stayed the same? How does the Order of Confession and Forgiveness reflect our Lutheran understanding of sin?

**Simul = “simultaneously”**

**Justis = “justified”**

**Et = “and”**

**Peccator = “sinful”**

## SESSION ONE



### Bonus Activity:

Martin Luther described confession and forgiveness as a daily returning to our baptism, a daily dying to sin and being raised to new life in Christ. Take a look at the rite of Holy Baptism in your worship book (for example, *ELW*, pages 227–231). What images of new life and walking in the light do you see in this service?



### Tip:

Be aware that some may feel uncomfortable sharing personal responses. Make clear that responding to these questions is voluntary.



### Bonus Activity:

Take your group on a walking tour around your church building, looking for various images and symbols of baptism. Take some time to talk about the significance of each image or symbol you find.



### Bonus Activity:

Gather paper for writing or drawing, markers, pencils, clay, and any other creative materials you wish. Read Romans 6:1–4 aloud. Encourage participants to think creatively about what it means to walk in newness of life. Invite them to draw a picture, write a poem, or sculpt a clay figure expressing what it's like to have the opportunity for “new life.”

### Devotional Context

Our session text, 1 John 1:1–2:2, describes the saving work of Jesus and calls us to walk together in the light of Christ's forgiveness. Consider how these themes connect to you, your life, and to others. Think about what God is saying to you through this text.

1. The writer of 1 John made a point of talking about how he (“we”) had touched and seen Jesus. If you wish, describe a time when you touched Jesus or he touched you. What does this mean for you? Reflect upon a time in your life when you walked in darkness. How did the light of Christ appear?

2. In *Evangelical Lutheran Worship's* rite of Holy Baptism, the newly baptized are presented with a candle accompanied by either the words, “Jesus said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life,” or the words, “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (*ELW*, p. 231).

- How might you reflect the light of Christ?
- Reflect on this statement: We are saved “for” good works, not “by” good works.

3. Look back at the Focus Image for the session on p. 5. How does that image relate to the session text or to anything you have discussed so far?

4. Think about today's text in the light of all we've experienced in this session:

- Relate any new thought or insight you have as a result of this experience.
- Express in a word or image who Jesus really is—to you.

### Wrap-up

Review the key insights of this session.

1. Look back at the terms initially used to describe Jesus. What new ideas can be added? As time allows, you could put the words *Jesus* and *Humanity* on separate sheets of chart paper. Identify who Jesus is and who we are as you summarize the session.

2. Invite participants to share any new questions that were raised for them during this session. Write these down and possibly use one of them as a discussion starter for your next session together.

**Pray**

*Ever-living God, author of creation, we give you thanks for your gift of water that brings life and refreshes the earth. We bless and praise you, for by water and the Word we are cleansed from sin and receive everlasting life. Join us again this day to the saving death of Christ; renew in us the living fountain of your grace; and raise us with Christ Jesus to live in newness of life; for you are merciful, and you love your whole creation, and with all your creatures we give you glory, through your Son Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. (ELW, p. 307)*

**Extending the Conversation****Homework**

1. Read the next session's Bible passage: 1 John 2:29—3:24.
2. Each day during the coming week, reread 1 John 1:1—2:2. Reflect on those dark places in your life that need to be transformed by the light of Christ. If you wish, keep a daily journal, writing about how God speaks to you through this text each day.
3. Read 1 John 2:3-29 and learn more about what it means to walk in the light.
4. Visit the Book of Faith Web site at [www.bookoffaith.org](http://www.bookoffaith.org). Consider creating or joining a social network and starting an online conversation on 1 John!

**Looking Ahead**

1. Read the next session's Bible passage: 1 John 2:29—3:24.
2. Read through the next session's Leader Session Guide and mark the portions you wish to highlight for the group.
3. Make a checklist of any materials you'll need to do the Bonus Activities.

**Enrichment**

1. Sit in a dark room and light a small candle—perhaps your baptismal candle if you have one. Reflect on the effect the candle has on the darkness. How is the darkness like our lives? How is the candle like the light of Christ? Pray a prayer asking God to help you walk in the light of Christ.

**Tip:**

You may wish to sing the hymn "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light" (ELW 815; WOV 649) or another appropriate hymn.

**Tip:**

Encourage the keeping of a daily journal. You may even wish to provide a low-cost journal to each learner.



## SESSION ONE

2. If you have been baptized, create a poster or drawing expressing what your baptism means to you. If you haven't been baptized, ask your pastor or church staff for help in learning more about baptism or scheduling a baptism in your congregation.

3. Watch the movie *Four Christmases* (New Line Cinema, 2008) or *Walk the Line* (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2005). Where is the darkness portrayed? Where is the light portrayed? How does the light break into the darkness?

### For Further Reading

Available at [www.augsburgfortress.org/store](http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store):

*Baptism: A User's Guide* by Martin E. Marty. Discusses baptism as daily nourishment for the Christian life.

*No Greater Jewel: Thinking about Baptism with Luther* by Kirsi Stjerna. Provides a historical, theological, and practical review of baptism.

*A Love Supreme: A History of the Johannine Tradition* by Allen Dwight Callahan. A scholarly look at the works collectively known as Johannine tradition—the Gospel of John and 1, 2, and 3 John.