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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.

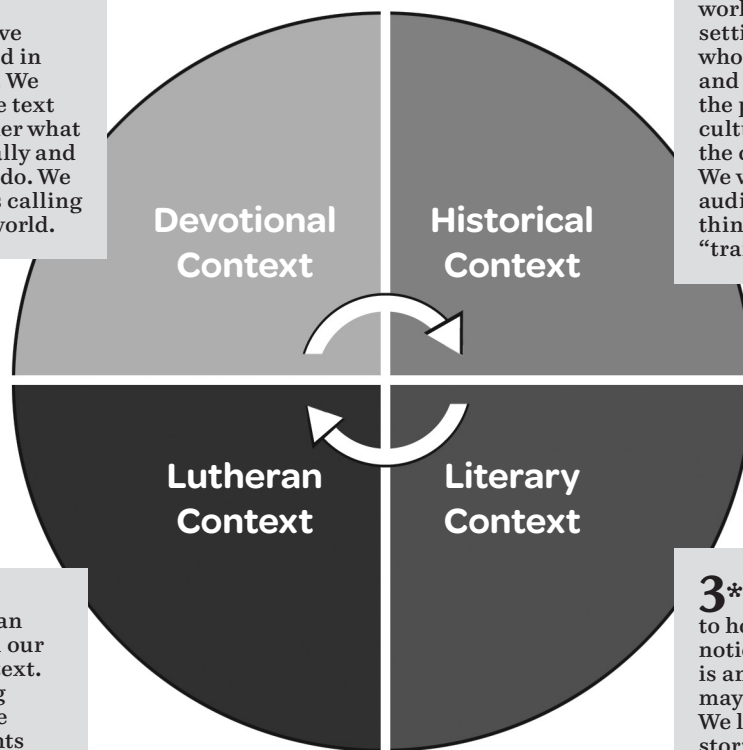
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience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

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.
- **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.

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 Jeremiah, Lamentations 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 and 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.

Jeremiah, Lamentations Unit Overview

The books of Jeremiah and Lamentations include prophetic and poetic materials that came about because of two crises facing God's people. First, Babylonia was threatening to invade at the beginning of the 6th century B.C.E. Second, the Babylonian conquest of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. was followed by a human and religious crisis.

We encounter many voices in the pages of these books: the prophet Jeremiah, sundry kings, Jeremiah's enemies, and a people at first defiant and later in excruciating torment. In addition, we hear the voice of God speaking through Jeremiah and Jeremiah's contemporaries. God, however, does not just speak "back there" and "then." The living God speaks to us through the Bible, this book of faith. God is revealed to us as one who will not rest until we are at last a people whose hearts and minds are molded to the image and likeness of Jesus.

This eight-session course explores selected representative passages from Jeremiah and one from Lamentations by means of eight questions:

Session 1 (Jeremiah 1:1-19) asks, "Has God called me?" Although Jeremiah's call was a particular summons to ministry for an individual, it gives us an opportunity to reflect on the ways God calls us to carry God's word into the world.

Session 2 (Jeremiah 5:1-31) asks, "Why has God done all these things to us?" To people persuaded that God was punishing them and who wondered why, God provides an answer. The answer to Judah is not an explanation for any disaster that may befall us, but it does reveal a God who is serious about our discipleship.

Session 3 (Jeremiah 7:1—8:3) asks, "Where is the disconnect?" Jeremiah's so-called Temple Sermon clearly articulates the dissociation between religious professions and appropriate behaviors. This "disconnect" results in God's anger, which is based on the awareness that sin hurts people.

Session 4 (Jeremiah 8:14—9:1) asks, "What makes God cry?" This very question may be surprising. We don't often think of God as suffering, yet Jeremiah's anguish reveals the suffering of a God whose heart can be broken.

Session 5 (Jeremiah 13:1-14) asks, "Can God love rags?" The answer, of course, is that God loves us, whether we are dressed in royal robes or rags. Only God can redeem and make whole the tattered fabric of our lives, making us fit to be intimate with God.

Session 6 (Jeremiah 31:27-40) asks, "How certain is our future?" In an age when, for many good reasons, we are concerned about our future, the comprehensive promise of God shouts good news.

Session 7 (Jeremiah 50:1-20) asks, "Can you imagine a different world?" To exiles both ancient and modern, God declares that the forces that oppress have lost their power. God opens our eyes to see signposts of the kingdom toward which we are bound.

Session 8 (Lamentations 3:1-39) asks, "Will God turn to save us?" The answer to that question was by no means assured for ancient Israel, but the poet of Lamentations certainly believed that God *ought* to save! Through this daring lament, we gain permission to be honest with God when we are in pain.

Jeremiah 1:1-19

Leader Session Guide

Focus Statement

God's particular call to the young Jeremiah gives us an opportunity to consider how we also are summoned to speak God's word in our own day and time, as well as to reflect upon those circumstances that make our call fearsome and difficult.

Key Verse

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
Jeremiah 1:5

Focus Image



© iStockphoto.com / Martti Salmela

Has God Called Me?

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

Take a few moments to consider how and when you have been called by God. How is it that you have come to lead this session? Is this God's way of using you and your gifts to share God's love for the world? Read the baptismal liturgy in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (pp. 227-231) and, especially, the promises made by the parents, sponsors, and congregation (p. 228). You have been called to share the good news.

Session Instructions

1. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
2. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you'll need, if any.
3. Have extra Bibles on hand in case a member of the group forgets to bring one. *Lutheran Study Bible* (Augsburg Fortress, 2009) is highly recommended.

Session Overview

Called to be a **prophet** when he was "only a boy," Jeremiah was commanded to commit his prophecies to writing about twenty years later (see Jeremiah 36:1-2). During his lifetime, however, the first edition of his sermons was destroyed and rewritten precisely because they concerned events of his day (see Jeremiah 36:21-32). As is typical of Israel's prophets, Jeremiah was not delivering obscure predictions about events that would occur millennia after his day, but the judgments of God on the circumstances of the people. Later, Jeremiah's prophecies provided a lens to interpret the events of Israel's past, especially the destruction of Jerusalem. God continues to speak through the words of Jeremiah today.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 626 B.C.E., God summoned Jeremiah to a prophetic career that spanned approximately forty years. These were tumultuous times in the life of ancient Judah. The Assyrian Empire, the dominant superpower for centuries, fell to Babylon. Judah rebelled against the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar who, in 587 B.C.E., razed Jerusalem and sent the last of Judah's leaders into exile.

? Prophet:

We get this word from the Greek *prophetes*, literally a “forthteller.” In the Bible, there is evidence of prophets who, like Jeremiah, were given a message by God to tell the people. The prophet serves as a spokesperson for God. In addition, there were “professional” prophets, consulted to determine the will of God (see 1 Kings 22) and roaming bands of ecstatic prophets (see 1 Samuel 10:10-12).

Jeremiah’s prophecies interpreted the events of his day in light of God’s purposes and will.

While Jeremiah’s task is obviously daunting, his call is fearsome for another reason. His appointment is to deliver a word of demolition and destruction; building and planting will come only after obliteration. Confirming this charge are two visions. The first, the branch of an almond tree, confirms the certainty of God’s word. The second vision anticipates destruction pouring down on Judah from the north, as a consequence of the people’s idolatry. Participants may well be uncomfortable with the idea of God’s wrath and punishment. Note, however, that without God’s enmity of sin and its destructive power on God’s people, we would know nothing of God’s will for our well-being and salvation.

Jeremiah’s path will not be easy. On the contrary, he will meet vigorous resistance (1:17-19). And yet, Jeremiah is to stand firm “or else.” The prophet’s only resource will be the strength he receives from the promised presence of God.

LITERARY CONTEXT

If you were to encounter a story that began “Once upon a time . . .,” you would likely recognize that you had before you a fairy tale. You might even anticipate a fairy tale’s normal ending (“And they lived happily ever after”). Similarly, scholars have long recognized forms in biblical literature. The *prophetic call narrative* is one such form, typically consisting of the following parts:

1. God confronts the prophet (Jeremiah 1:4-5)
2. The prophet expresses some objection to this summons (1:6)
3. God overcomes the prophet’s objection with words of assurance and often the promise of God’s own presence (1:7-8)
4. Often there follows a sign that confirms the commission (1:9)

Typically, these parts are followed by a sort of summary of the major themes of the prophet’s message, here a commission “to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (1:10). One can find these elements, in whole or in part, in the summons to Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, and others.

A call narrative is recorded, in part, to authenticate the prophet’s words. The authentic prophet is one who has stood in the LORD’s

council so as to see and hear the word. Jeremiah's call contrasts sharply with the condemned false prophets of Jeremiah 23:16-18.

LUTHERAN CONTEXT

In modern times, biblical prophecy has often been misunderstood as a sort of long-distance fortune-telling. While the prophets did concern themselves with the future, it was usually a future near at hand and pertinent to the prophet's hearers. An appreciation of the historical context from which Jeremiah's call emerged helps safeguard against random interpretations of the biblical text, as does the Lutheran principle of understanding the text in its plain meaning.

In the Lutheran Context, participants will consider the text in its plain sense. Some participants may wish to associate Jeremiah 1:5 with the sensitive issue of abortion. Yet it is quite unlikely that Jeremiah or his readers would have interpreted these words in this way. More fruitful would be a conversation about God's decision to be present and gracious for Jeremiah (and for us!), engaging Paul's language of **predestination** (Romans 8:28-30). Such a conversation would lead rather naturally to God's "plan" for our lives. **Consecrated** before he was born, one might conclude that Jeremiah's life is pre-planned by God, although the possibility of the prophet's failure (1:17) suggests that things are not, finally, fully settled ahead of the fact. And even if God does have a plan for Jeremiah, it does not follow that *our* vocations and life partners—or, for that matter, our cancers, automobile accidents, or house fires—are predetermined by God. Again, Paul's declaration of Romans 8:28 (however that verse is best translated) suggests that God promises to be with us—and for us—come what may. That, finally, is God's plan.

DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

Who needs a prophet? Evidently, the LORD had need for Jeremiah to speak to the kings and people of Judah. Perhaps God could have communicated by some other means, but the Bible testifies, again and again, that God chooses to address us through ordinary words spoken by those whom God has summoned. Ultimately, of course, God addressed the world through the Word made flesh, Jesus the Christ. Jesus is God's quintessential self-expression. Nevertheless, God continues to speak, in words, through the Bible and through the testimony of the church. We can hear God's address as we read Jeremiah, as we listen to a sermon, as we receive the mutual consolation and encouragement that comes in conversations with other believers.



Predestination:

Lutherans understand the idea of predestination to be a doctrine of comfort. The idea is that God has chosen us from the beginning of time to be God's own children. Those who embrace that announcement in faith prove it so. See 1 Timothy 2:3-4. Lutherans do not accept "double predestination," the idea that God chooses some to be saved and some to be damned.



Consecrate:

The Hebrew word signals something that is set apart or devoted for God's use. The consecrated item could be a temple (2 Chronicles 2:3-4), a city (Joshua 20:7), offerings (Leviticus 22:2) or, as here, a person.

The remarkable gift in God’s decision to use human beings and ordinary words to express God’s will and purpose is that we all have a share in the ministry of the good news. Sharing the love of God is not within the purview of professional preachers alone; all the baptized are summoned to proclaim Christ through word and deed. Like Jeremiah, the Word of God has come to us. Participants will talk about when they have been addressed by God through another person or when they believe God used their words. They may object to this, like the prophet Jeremiah, declaring themselves inadequate to the job. On a whiteboard, gather a list of “objections” to the call to share the good news. Then, as a group, consider how 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Jeremiah 1:8 deal with those objections.

Facilitator’s Prayer

Lord, you once put your word in the mouth of your servant Jeremiah. Help me, I pray, to speak your word as well. Cause me to remember that, by the grace that is mine in Christ, you are with me. I ask your Holy Spirit to surround each participant so that, throughout this study, we might be led to consider those things that are pleasing to you. I ask this in the name of the Word Incarnate, your Son, Jesus. Amen.



Tip:

If it seems likely that the members of the group do not know each other, provide index cards and markers. Invite them to fold their cards in half lengthwise and then write their names on one side of the cards. Have these cards displayed at each session.



Tip:

Pray the prayer in unison.



Tip:

Provide paper, pens, and pencils to the learners. Also have a whiteboard or chart paper and markers available.



Tip:

Have volunteers read their sentences. Record key words or phrases on the whiteboard.

Gather (10–15 minutes)

Check-in

Take time to greet each person and invite learners to introduce themselves to one another.

Pray

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, but always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Augsburg Fortress, 2006, p. 86)

Focus Activity

In the Bible, a prophet is someone called to speak God’s word. Look at the Focus Image and consider the title for this session: Has God Called Me? In one sentence, write down why God might—or might not—need a prophet.

Open Scripture (10–15 minutes)

Read the text as a mini-play. Secure three volunteers to read the parts of the narrator, God, and Jeremiah, respectively. Consider providing the readers with copies of the text with their parts highlighted.

OR

Provide each participant with a picture of an almond branch in flower—or a small tree branch of any kind—to hold as the text is read. Point out the NRSV footnotes that signal the pun between *almond branch* and *watching*. Jeremiah’s vision is a graphic reminder that God’s word is certain.

Read Jeremiah 1:1-19.

- What stood out for you as important in the passage? Why?
- What do you find comforting in the passage? What do you find challenging?
- What questions does this passage raise for you?

Join the Conversation (25–55 minutes)

Historical Context

1. The first chapter of Jeremiah divides into two parts: the historical setting of Jeremiah’s entire ministry is described in verses 1 to 3, while the actual call of the prophet appears in verses 4 to 19. Although short, the historical setting is important. From it we learn that Jeremiah’s prophecies are set in the context of watershed events in Israel’s life, especially the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian Empire. Later generations understood the meaning of these events through the messages from God spoken by Jeremiah.

- Is the word of God appropriately addressed to governments? If so, how? If not, why not?

2. The references to the disaster that approached from the north show that Jeremiah’s call and the messages he delivered were linked to a particular time and circumstance. Jeremiah’s concern was to deliver a timely word to God’s people in the hope that they might come to realize their sin and turn back to God. The task was daunting and Jeremiah’s words of doom and gloom were not likely to be warmly received. Accordingly, God promised to be present for Jeremiah.

+ Bonus Activity:

Imagine living in ancient Judah and hearing Jeremiah’s message from God. What would you think? What would you do?

SESSION ONE



Tip:

Use the whiteboard or chart paper to record descriptions of Jeremiah's reaction in one column. In a second column, record participants' reactions and emotions.



Tip:

For a chart that identifies several elements in the calls of Moses, Jeremiah, and other prophets, see <http://www.crivoice.org/prophetcall.html>.



Bonus Activity:

The prophetic call narrative also appears in the New Testament. Investigate and identify these features in the story of Ananias (Acts 9:10-16) and, especially, with Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Like the prophets, Mary is called to bear the Word of God into the world.



Tip:

Consider making commentaries or study Bibles available for participants to consult once they have had an opportunity to surmise the plain meaning of these verses.



Bonus Activity:

Ask any parents among the participants to share their "plans" for their children, or ask participants to share the "plans" they perceive their parents had for them. Usually, a parent's plans are not terribly specific. Parents hope their children will be happy, healthy, and so on. Ponder together whether God behaves differently than parents.

- Consider Jeremiah 1:4-19, then write down one word that you think describes Jeremiah's reaction to his call.
- Imagine that, like Jeremiah, you heard God summon you to speak God's word. How might you react? What emotions would you experience?

Literary Context

1. Scholars have long recognized recurring patterns of form in many biblical texts, including the type we have before us, the *prophetic call narrative*. The dialogue between God and Jeremiah follows a known sequence in which the prophet is commissioned.
 - Review Jeremiah 1:4-19. Make a list of the steps that occur in this passage after God addresses Jeremiah. What does Jeremiah say? Then what happens?
 - Compare your list from the activity above to the call of Moses in Exodus 3. What might an ancient Israelite conclude about Jeremiah, based on the similarities?
2. A prophetic call narrative not only gives us a preview of the themes of the prophet's messages, but also assures the reader that this is, indeed, someone who has been addressed by God and who authentically proclaims God's word.
 - Why might it have been important for ancient hearers to be assured that Jeremiah's proclamation was authentic? What was at risk if he was a false prophet?
 - If Jeremiah's call narrative is a preview of his ministry and message, make a list of the sort of things we can anticipate him saying in the rest of this book of the Bible.

Lutheran Context

1. A guiding Lutheran principle for understanding the Scripture is that the Bible should be interpreted according to its plain meaning. In *Opening the Book of Faith*, Mark Allan Powell explains, "This means that passages are to be understood in the sense that would have seemed obvious to their original readers. They are not to be taken out of context or twisted to be read in a sense that never would have occurred to their original readers" (Augsburg Fortress, 2008, p. 37).
 - What might have been the plain meaning of Jeremiah 1:5 for those who preserved and read this portion of Jeremiah's call?
 - What might have been the plain meaning of Jeremiah 1:14-16 for those who preserved and read this portion of the call?
2. Believers are sometimes tempted to embrace words addressed to biblical characters as direct and unmediated promises

or statements about themselves or about our contemporary historical context.

- Does God have a plan for Jeremiah’s life? What is it? Are all details scripted in advance, or not?
- Does Jeremiah 1:1-19 signal that God has specific vocational plans for all people? Why or why not?

Devotional Context

1. Jeremiah’s call makes it clear that God chooses to employ people as a means to spread God’s word. Perhaps God could communicate with us in another way, but God has chosen to speak through words communicated in the Bible and through words uttered by ordinary people.

- Describe a time when God spoke to you through another person, or a time when you believe that God spoke through you.

2. Our “call story” comes in baptism. In *Evangelical Lutheran Worship’s* rite of Holy Baptism, parents and congregants promise to nurture children in the faith so that they might “learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace” (p. 228).

- List what the baptized in your congregation are doing to live out the words of the baptismal liturgy. Where could a visitor, for example, find evidence of proclamation, care, or work for justice and peace?

Wrap-up

1. If there are any questions to explore further, write them on chart paper or a whiteboard. Ask for volunteers to do further research to share with the group at the next session.

2. As this study has been about the call of Jeremiah, this is a good time to consider our own calls. Read aloud 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. Have each participant complete the following sentence: I am called by God and charged to carry the good news into the world even though I am Tell participants that they will have an opportunity to share their sentences, if they so choose.

Pray

Ever-living God, we give you thanks that you have called us through baptismal water and the Word to be your servants. On the strength of your baptismal claim on us, help us to learn to trust you more so that we might proclaim Christ boldly, care for others and the creation you have made, and continue the struggle for justice and peace until your reign is fully realized. Teach us to be your messengers, speaking—as we pray—in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bonus Activity:

Sing together “We All Are One in Mission” (ELW 576). If you know there are musicians among the participants, elicit their help in advance. Otherwise, the tune can be found at <http://www.lutheran-hymnal.com/wov/wov755.mid>.

Tip:

Sharing stories in pairs or triads will allow every participant an opportunity to speak.

Bonus Activity:

If your group is meeting at your church facility, take a walking tour of the church to locate evidence of proclamation, care, or work for justice and peace. Otherwise, search for such evidence in copies of the worship bulletin and newsletter.

Tip:

Write the first part of the sentence on a whiteboard or chart paper, or print it and provide participants with photocopies. Consider using this activity as a prelude to the prayer. Invite volunteers to share their sentences. Conclude each sentence with this statement: “Jesus [is our] wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).



Tip:

Ask if there are any volunteers who would like to research the church's work in advocacy and give a brief report at the beginning of the next session.

Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Homework

1. Read the next session's Scripture text, Jeremiah 5:1-31, slowly and prayerfully.
2. This week, begin each day with a prayer that you might be sensitive to how God might be speaking to you through others. Carry a small notepad or piece of paper to record times when that prayer is answered. At the next session, share what you discovered about yourself in this process.
3. Find information about how the larger church is caring for creation and working for justice and peace. At the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Web site, www.elca.org, search for "environment" or "justice and peace." To discover how the church speaks to the government, search for "advocacy." If your congregation does not regularly have access to information about the work the church is doing throughout the world, consider discussing with your pastor how you might partner with others in your congregation to share that exciting news.
4. Incorporate the singing of "We All Are One in Mission" (ELW 576) in your daily devotional life this week. Consider how the summons to service in that hymn reflects Jeremiah's call and your own.
5. Make three columns on a piece of paper. In the first column, list all of the reasons you find it hard to speak about your faith in Jesus to your family, neighbors, or coworkers. Next to each item, jot down what you believe God might have to say about your reason. This week, look for opportunities God gives you to speak about the one in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), and record them in the third column. Share your experiences with your group next week.

Enrichment

If you want to read through the entire books of Jeremiah and Lamentations during this unit, read the following sections this week.

- Day 1: Jeremiah 1:1-19
- Day 2: Jeremiah 2:1-37

- Day 3: Jeremiah 3:1-25
- Day 4: Jeremiah 4:1-31
- Day 5: Jeremiah 5:1-31
- Day 6: Jeremiah 6:1-30
- Day 7: Jeremiah 7:1—8:3

2. Join the ELCA advocacy effort by signing up for the e-Advocacy network. Simply search for “e-advocacy” at www.elca.org and click on the link. Write a letter to your congressional representative or senator about an issue pertaining to care for others, the world, or justice and peace.

3. Do online research regarding the biography of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., noting the ways that King’s ministry interfaced with and challenged governmental powers. Videos of many of King’s sermons and speeches, including his “I have a dream” speech, are available on the Internet. Ponder the ways that King’s ministry was similar to and different from Jeremiah’s.

4. View the film *Oh, God!* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1997), paying special attention to the scene in which Jerry, a supermarket assistant manager, is called to spread God’s word even though he believes himself to be entirely unequal to the task. For a darker and more violent version of one who heeds the prophetic call, see the film *The Book of Eli* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010).

For Further Reading

Jeremiah by Terence E. Fretheim (Smyth Helwys Bible Commentary Series, vol. 15; Smyth Helwys, 2002). A thorough but completely approachable discussion of the entire book of Jeremiah.

“The Prophetic ‘Call’ Narrative: Commissioning into Service” by Dennis Bratcher, at <http://www.crivoice.org/prophetcall.html>. Describes the form or pattern of call narratives in the Bible, and their likely meaning.

Available at www.augsburgfortress.org:

The Prophetic Imagination by Walter Brueggemann (Fortress Press, 2001). Brueggemann demonstrates how prophetic address functions not only to describe the real world, but leads us to imagine (and thus to see) the new reality God is fashioning.

SESSION ONE

Looking Ahead

1. Read the next session's Bible text: Jeremiah 5:1-31.
2. Read through the Leader Guide for the next session and mark portions you wish to highlight for the group.
3. Make a checklist of any materials you'll need to do the Bonus Activities.
4. Pray for members of your group during the week.