



# CHURCH IN WAITING

*Studies for Advent, Year B*

TOGETHER <sup>IN</sup> FAITH SERIES

## Leader Session Guide

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CHURCH IN WAITING: STUDIES FOR ADVENT, YEAR B  
Leader Session Guide

Together in Faith Series  
Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

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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.

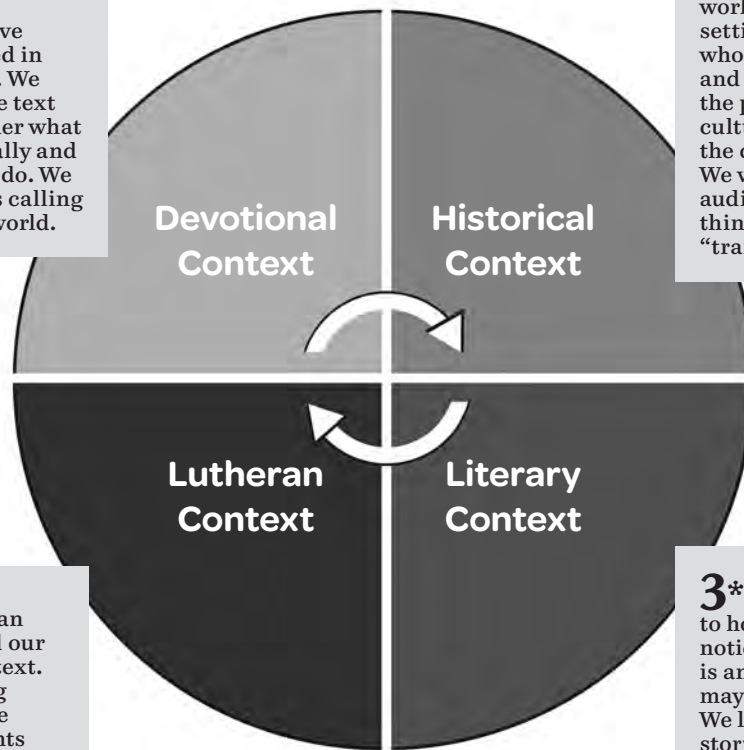
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience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

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-oriented 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.

**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.



**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.

**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 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.

## Church in Waiting: Studies for Advent, Year B Unit Overview

Advent, Year B, exemplifies the Revised Common Lectionary practice of proclaiming four Gospels over three years, with epistle lessons illuminating the season or complementing the Gospel. The Advent epistle texts prepare us for the coming of

Jesus Christ and the arrival of a new heaven and new earth. The Advent Gospel texts announce this as well, but on the lips of specific preachers.

All the readings emphasize the shape faith should take as Christians wait for the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the readings are like a list of “best practices” for a waiting church. Keep awake. Be enriched and strengthened. Lead lives of holiness. Wait patiently. Be at peace. Prepare the way of the Lord. Repent. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks. Test everything. Abstain from evil. Give glory to God. Do not be afraid. Let it be.

The Latin word *adventus* is a translation of the Greek term *parousia*, often translated as “coming” (see 2 Peter 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Advent is an invitation to celebrate both our hopeful anticipation of the second coming of Christ, as well as our commemoration of the Messiah’s first advent announced by Gabriel to Mary in Nazareth.

Keeping time according to the church year is a grace, not a requirement. The grace of Advent is best received in community. These sessions, together with the liturgy and preaching supports, offer an opportunity to awaken to the gift of time provided by the celebration of Advent. These lectionary texts point us to prophetic words and songs that prepare us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in all circumstances as together we prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Session 1: Be Enriched and Strengthened**  
(1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37)

We are awake and strengthened because Jesus Christ through the word gives all the various gifts necessary for the church as it waits for his revealing.

**Session 2: Wait Patiently** (2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8)

The church is called to listen patiently to the proclamation of God’s promises through preachers and prophets regarding the patience of God as our salvation, so that all might come to repentance.

**Session 3: Repent and Prepare the Way of the Lord**  
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28)

Like John the Baptist, we are called to repent and proclaim Christ as we await his coming.

**Session 4: Glorify God through Jesus Christ**  
(Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38)

In our lives, and through the church, we are called to give glory to God through Jesus Christ.



## SESSION ONE

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

#### Leader Session Guide

#### Focus Statement

We are awake and strengthened, because Jesus Christ through the word gives all the various gifts necessary for the church as it waits for his revealing.

#### Key Verse

For in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:5-7

#### Focus Image



© Sean Locke / iStockphoto

## Be Enriched and Strengthened

### Session Preparation

#### Before You Begin . . .

Jesus' repeated challenge to "keep awake" (Mark 13:35, 37) can be jarring, even exhausting, if not paired with the comforting and energizing proclamation that he will call, strengthen, and enrich until the very end the same community he commands to keep awake (1 Corinthians 1:8). His word endures forever (Mark 13:31). The church is set free to wait for the coming of its Lord—awake, alive, inspired—because it **proleptically** participates already in that which it anticipates, including the gifts of the Spirit and the opportunity to give thanks.

#### 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.
4. If you plan to analyze the Great Thanksgiving, or encourage the use of a specific spiritual gifts inventory, prepare these resources ahead of time.

#### Session Overview

The testimony of Christ strengthens the community so that it is "not lacking in any spiritual gift as [it] waits for the revealing of [its] Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). This session gives special attention to the epistle lesson for the day as an important **counterpoint** to the Gospel. Although Paul's thanksgiving in 1 Corinthians and Jesus' preaching of the **imminent kingdom** in Mark may sound very different, they are beautiful and true when played simultaneously, and the harmony of the two is best heard through a solid emphasis on 1 Corinthians, with subdued but concentrated attention to Mark.

## SESSION ONE

### ? **Prolepsis:**

When the future is experienced or seen already in the anticipation of it.

### ? **Counterpoint:**

Involves the writing of musical lines that sound very different and move independently from each other but are harmonious when played simultaneously.

### ? **Imminent kingdom:**

The kingdom of God as coming very soon, in one's own lifetime.

### LITERARY CONTEXT

Paul frequently encourages his readers to give thanks (see, for example, Colossians 3:15), so it is no surprise that he devotes considerable craft to formulating the formal thanksgivings that open many of his letters. In fact, Paul mentions giving thanks more than any other biblical author, and in comparative literature of his time, encourages giving thanks more than any other contemporary—pagan or Christian (see David Pao, *Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme* [Westmont, IL: Intervarsity, 2002]).

Here is an important literary consideration. Just because the thanksgiving at the beginning of 1 Corinthians is *pro forma* does not mean it is not significant within the letter as a whole or indicative of Paul's overall theological approach. Just the opposite. Paul makes careful use of the opening thanksgiving precisely to highlight early on what he anticipates addressing later in his letter. The thanksgiving we read here is in this sense not a habitual opening statement Paul needs to include to make the letter proper, but is instead profoundly indicative of Paul's theological approach as a whole. Paul's theology is thoroughly eucharistic, and his thanksgivings illustrate precisely to what degree this is so.

Paul's thanksgiving links his theology to eschatology, because to give thanks is to live in anticipation of God's future works in Christ. By composing the thanksgiving in the way that he does, Paul directs everything toward God and emphasizes that everything is given through Christ.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

More so than almost any other text in the New Testament, adequate understanding of the historical context of Corinth will determine how successfully one comprehends this letter. Corinth was an important port city on major trade routes for both land and sea. It was a community marked by considerable disparities of wealth and power, as well as considerable religious diversity (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul's list of those participating in the Corinthian church includes both Jew and Greek, slave and free. Some of the conflict in the congregation arose between the rich and the poor (both materially, as in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, and spiritually, as in 1 Corinthians 4:8).

Although Paul is addressing divisions between various factions in the Corinthian community, the major division represented by the letter is the division between Paul and the Corinthians. He is

defending himself in his letter, and specifically his authority as a spiritual leader. The Corinthians have developed an overrealized eschatology that has collapsed the already/not yet **eschatology** of Paul into a realized eschatology of the already present spirit in which some of them are boasting. Paul's task in the letter is to reassert his eschatological theology that focuses on the death and resurrection of Christ, already begun now through the presence of the Holy Spirit, but not yet fully realized as we wait for "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:8).

Paul's opening thanksgiving therefore emphasizes and celebrates the gifts the Holy Spirit has already given while also lifting up the "not yet" of Christ's further revealing. Furthermore, it calls the Corinthians to live a life of full ethical obedience and exercising of spiritual gifts as they wait for their coming Lord, rather than one of divisive boasting in their comparative spiritual and material riches.

#### LUTHERAN CONTEXT

Lutherans tend to resonate with Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians that the gifts of the Spirit are for the building up of the common good of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7). There is a marked tendency among Lutherans not to elevate some gifts over others, perhaps influenced by the original concern in the reform movement that the gifts of the monastic communities had inappropriately taken pride of place over the vocational gifts of the laity.

Lutherans also become concerned whenever it is assumed that the gifts of the Spirit are active only in a few, rather than distributed throughout the whole for the common good. In the context of this Advent study, it is especially important to lift up the truth that every Christian community, through the word of Christ, has all the gifts needed for ministry, not for the sake of boasting, but so that the community might be awake, alive, and prepared for the coming Christ.

However, it is important also to pay attention to 1 Corinthians 2:14: "Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Lutherans should be concerned if any of their communities are unspiritual and unwilling to receive the gifts of God's Spirit. In fact, the early reformers were equally concerned about the lack of spirituality and faith they observed when visiting churches around Wittenberg. The Small Catechism was written as one

#### ? **Eschatology:**

The doctrine or study of last things.

## SESSION ONE

response to this problem. Luther writes in its introduction, “The deplorable, wretched deprivation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism, or Christian instruction, in such a brief, plain, and simple version. Dear God, what misery I beheld! The ordinary person, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about the Christian faith, and unfortunately many pastors are completely unskilled and incompetent teachers” (*Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], p. 347).

Luther’s focus, the doctrine he most wished to pass on, was an emphasis on what God is actively doing—forgiving, justifying, saving—through the Word and sacraments. The Christian is called to thankfulness in response, but even thanksgiving arises out of the prior gift of the Spirit.

### DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

Trust that the testimony of Christ gives everything necessary. God is faithful. You are not lacking in any spiritual gifts. Give thanks. Heaven and earth will pass away, but Christ’s words will not pass away.

Although listening to counterpoint in music can be immediately enjoyable, to learn precisely how counterpoint works as it does, one must attend carefully to both points and then discern carefully how the two work together to create the beauty that they do.

Various apocalyptic texts in Scripture are examples of this, sounding notes like: “Beware!” “The sun will be darkened.” “About that day or hour no one knows.” As this melody flows along, preachers and teachers may be at risk of missing the counterpoint, which sounds out: “He is near.” “His words will not pass away.” “He will strengthen you to the end.”

Because Paul is living in anticipation of the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is strong in faith and thanksgiving. Waiting for Christ is a full and enriching activity for him, because he trusts he has been given all the gifts necessary as he waits. Paul wants us to imitate him in this (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9); we are called to find creative ways to imitate Paul’s encouragement, strength, resolve, faith, and thankfulness. We are also called to trust, even in the midst of Jesus’ preaching of the imminent kingdom, that “heaven and earth will pass away, but [Christ’s] words will not pass away” (Mark 13:31).

**Facilitator's Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, I am waiting for you. Help me to live in the already/ not yet of your coming. I trust that I am not lacking in the gifts necessary to lead this Bible study because I am enriched in you. I trust that our community is not lacking in any gifts like speech and knowledge of any kind, because the testimony of Christ is in our midst. You are faithful. We are called into the fellowship of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Gather (10–15 minutes)****Check-in**

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

**Pray**

*Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Kent Gustavson, *Prayer of Good Courage* [Mountain Vespers, New York: Ninety and Nine Records, 2006]).*

**Focus Activity**

Take a look at the Focus Image. Tell the group about your favorite catalog and why you like to page through it. How does it make you feel? Do you enjoy browsing the catalog as much as you like owning items you've purchased from it? Why or why not? How is this similar or dissimilar to enjoying the presence of Christ even as we wait for him to be more fully revealed?

**Open Scripture (10–15 minutes)**

As a volunteer reads the Bible text, have participants underline any words or phrases that stand out to them or that they would like to know more about.

OR

Invite a volunteer before the session to handwrite the text on a scroll, and then dramatically read this thanksgiving from Paul to the group, scroll outstretched. Encourage the reader to dress in character, if possible.

**Tip:**

A musical version of this prayer is available for download on iTunes or at <http://www.kentgustavson.com/>.

**Tip:**

Bring along your favorite catalog, and earmark some pages to show off items you loved looking at but won't necessarily purchase. This will jump-start the conversation and help the group learn more about you.

**Tip:**

Because the text begins with a common liturgical greeting and is a formal thanksgiving greeting, it is especially powerful if read dramatically or in a formal fashion.

## SESSION ONE



### Tip:

For a useful structural chart comparing the Pauline epistles and their thanksgivings, see [http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT\\_Letters.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm). Print a copy of this chart for the group, and discuss similarities and differences between the various thanksgivings.



### Bonus Activity:

Take time to draft a thanksgiving, either as individuals or as a group, that is addressed to God, that indicates that whatever is given thanks for is given through Christ, and that also celebrates a real gift for which you are giving thanks. Consider celebrating the ministry of a staff person or key volunteer in the congregation in this way, and send the thanksgiving to them.



### Bonus Activity:

Find a thanksgiving from Greco-Roman literature, photocopy it, and bring it to the group, in order to compare the form of Paul's thanksgiving to the classic form in pagan literature. See, for example, Stanley K. Stower's *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986].



### Bonus Activity:

Find the city of Corinth on a good Bible map or on Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corinth>). Encourage participants to imagine what life might have been like there, keeping in mind its important location within the Mediterranean context.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 and Mark 13:24-37. (We will concentrate on the epistle during most of this session, and turn to the Gospel text in the Devotional Context.)

- List everything Paul gives thanks for in the 1 Corinthians text.
- In what other contexts have you heard phrases or language like this?
- What catches your eye or alerts your ear as you read and hear these texts?

## Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

### Literary Context

1. The text of 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 is a formal thanksgiving, and it follows a pattern typical of Paul in his other letters. Giving thanks to God is essential to a life lived in anticipation of “the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:7). Paul uses considerable craft in his opening thanksgivings—they often hint at central themes he will address later in the body of his letters.
  - Compare this thanksgiving to the thanksgivings in Paul's other letters, including Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:3-12; Romans 1:8-15; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; and Philemon 4-7.
2. Sing “I'm Going on a Journey” (ELW 446). Compose a fourth verse that continues the theme of this hymn, incorporating thanksgiving language from 1 Corinthians 1:3-9. If you would like to follow the pattern typically used by Paul, the structure is a) to give thanks, b) to God, c) always, d) for those receiving the letter, and e) for a variety of specific reasons.

### Historical Context

1. Paul, the author of many letters in the New Testament, was a persecutor of the early church. But after Christ was revealed to him in a dramatic, Damascus road event (see Galatians 1:13-17; Acts 9:1-9), he understood that he was called to be an apostle to the nations of the world—that is, the Gentiles (non-Jews).
  - Read Romans 15:20-21 and 2 Corinthians 10:15-16. Discuss Paul's motivation to preach the gospel in places that had never heard it.
2. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is actually the third in an exchange of letters between Paul and Corinth. It addresses a conflict between them. He is seeking to fortify his eroded



authority with the community and hopes to change the people's theology and behavior, because he believes the very nature of the gospel is at risk in their context. Central to their theological difference is a question of what it means to be "spiritual" while awaiting and anticipating the coming Holy Spirit.

- Why would Paul open his letter by giving thanks for the strengths of the spiritual gifts in a community where the nature of spiritual gifts (and his own giftedness) has been called into question?
- Draft a thanksgiving letter to a neighboring congregation, giving thanks for an aspect of its spiritual life that you hope to simultaneously celebrate and challenge.

### Lutheran Context

1. Lutherans tend to emphasize that even the thanksgiving sacrifice offered to God is inspired not by our own gratefulness, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So we can even be thankful for the gift of thankfulness itself, and we grow in thankfulness as we give thanks in the Spirit. This reminds us that we are not offering to God something that we already have, but instead offer only what has been first given to us, in faith.
  - Retell the story of a time when you spontaneously gave thanks. How did it feel? Have you ever received being thankful as a gift?
2. Look at the Great Thanksgiving in the liturgy (for example, ELW pp. 107–112), and compare its language to the language of Paul's thanksgiving. What do you notice?

### Devotional Context

1. Because Paul is living in anticipation of the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is strong in faith and thanksgiving. Waiting for Christ is a full and enriching activity for him because he trusts he has been given all the gifts necessary as he waits. Paul wants us to imitate him in this (2 Thessalonians 3:7–9); we are called to find creative ways to imitate Paul's encouragement, strength, resolve, faith, and thankfulness. We are also called to trust, even in the midst of Jesus' preaching of the imminent kingdom, that "heaven and earth will pass away, but [Christ's] words will not pass away" (Mark 13:31).
  - Dance or pantomime your thanksgiving to God. (Seriously, try this!) It may be the most freeing and strengthening thing you do all day. How does expression of thanksgiving through our body open us to thankfulness in unique ways?



#### Tip:

If addressing gifts or using a gifts inventory, be aware that this may be a new topic for many in your group.



#### Bonus Activity:

The Lutheran understanding of vocation involves using our gifts in daily life. Copy and distribute this seminal essay by Marc Kolden concerning the Lutheran understanding of vocation: [http://www2.luthersem.edu/Word&World/Archives/3-4\\_Luther/3-4\\_Kolden.pdf](http://www2.luthersem.edu/Word&World/Archives/3-4_Luther/3-4_Kolden.pdf). Consider offering a separate session to discuss the essay.



#### Bonus Activity:

In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses class disparity. According to Tex Sample in *Earthy Mysticism: Spirituality for Unspiritual People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008), different economic and social classes view spirituality differently. Discuss the spiritual practices currently encouraged in your congregation. Is your congregation offering spiritual practices commensurate with the diversity of classes represented in your congregation and community?



#### Tip:

"Thank you" is a prayer, all by itself. Say it as a breathing prayer while preparing to lead this study. Thank God for the group, for the opportunity to study scripture, for the season of Advent, for the incarnation, for the anticipation of Christ's coming, and so on.

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### Bonus Activity:

After practicing “thank you” as a breathing prayer for yourself as a leader, offer a time for meditation with the group, where you all pray “thank you” while breathing slowly. Thank God for the Gospel in Mark, and for the sermon you recently heard or will hear on these lectionary texts. Thank God for the preacher, and for hearers who hear the sermon.



### Bonus Activity:

Read Mark 13:7-8, a counterpoint to Mark 13:24-37 and an important text that has helped define already/not yet eschatology. The word for “not yet” in the Greek is *oupoa*. It appears frequently in Mark, including Mark 4:40; 8:17, 21; 11:2; and 13:7. It also occurs twice in 1 Corinthians, at 3:2 and 8:2. Read each of these verses in context, and see if a comparative reading of the texts lends even further understanding for the group about the tensions of the already/not yet experienced in Corinth and in the preaching of Jesus.



### Tip:

Repetition is a rhetorically and emotionally powerful component of prayer and praise. Have a box of tissues on hand in case this brings on tears.



### Tip:

The emphasis on spiritual gifts this week might be a good opportunity for you to learn more about your own spiritual gifts as a leader, for example, by inviting the group to do a 360-degree inventory for you (see <http://www.theforgottenways.org/apest/>).

- List everything you are thankful for in your life and church community. Do you lack anything? Are you rich?

2. Finally, having thoroughly immersed yourselves in Paul’s thanksgiving in 1 Corinthians, read Mark 13:24-37, the Gospel text for the day. How does the counterpoint of 1 Corinthians and Mark function? If the spiritual gifts are already playing in the community, how does Jesus’ preaching of the not yet sound in harmony with them?

### 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. Recap your discussion with these questions: How is giving thanks related to living in anticipation of the coming Christ? What did we learn from Paul about thanksgiving and spiritual gifts? How will you hear language of thanksgiving and gifts differently this week? How does the promised strengthening of the Spirit prepare you for the coming (advent) of Christ?

### Pray

*God our Father, thank you for your grace. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for enriching us in speech and knowledge of every kind. Thank you for strengthening the testimony of Christ in us. Thank you for giving us spiritual gifts. Thank you for strengthening us. Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for calling us into fellowship with Jesus Christ as our Lord. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen.*

## Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

### Homework

1. Read the next session’s Scripture texts: 2 Peter 3:8-15a and Mark 1:1-8.

2. Say thank you at least once an hour every day this week. Thank God; thank Jesus Christ; thank family, friends, neighbors, employees, children, and even pets. Keep a list of these thanksgivings, and ask God to strengthen you in and through them.



3. Watch a movie this week, such as *The Road* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010) or *The Book of Eli* (Warner Home Video, 2010), with a story that takes place after a disaster. Discuss with others how this genre of movies differs in spiritual emphasis from Paul. Compare despair/hope, loss/gain, fear/hope, lack/abundance, and death/life.

### Enrichment

1. Paul's thanksgiving in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 uses a "blessed be" construction rather than elements of his usual thanksgivings, and his letter to the Galatians contains no thanksgiving at all. Consider what Paul intends with the change in format in these letters.

2. Take the APEST gifts assessment (available for a small fee at <http://www.theforgottenways.org/apest/>), the ELCA spiritual gifts assessment (<http://www2.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/assessments/spiritgifts.html>), or another online spiritual gifts assessment in order to discern how God has strengthened you with spiritual gifts. Covenant to take such an assessment together as a small or large group.

### For Further Reading

*Lifekeys: Discover Who You Are* by Jane Kise, David Stark, and Sandra Krebs Hirsh (Bloomington, Minn.: Bethany House, 2005).

*On the Incarnation* by Saint Athanasius (Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's, 1996).

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

*The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* by Jürgen Moltmann (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

*Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* by Tom Wright (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

### Looking Ahead

1. Read the next session's Bible text: 2 Peter 3:8-15a and Mark 1:1-8.
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.



### Tip:

Bring copies of these books to the session if possible, or consider acquiring them for your church library.