

The material here is linked to the October–December issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about forty-five minutes of study. Feel free to duplicate the questions and use them with *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

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October Week 1 Discussion Questions

October 1–4; Nehemiah 1–6

1. Upon learning of the deplorable conditions in Jerusalem, Nehemiah comes before God in repentant prayer. According to Nehemiah 1:10, what is the relationship between God's people and God? How was this relationship established?
2. Review Nehemiah 2. For what purpose and to what effect did Nehemiah speak the words described in verse 18?
3. Though threatened by enemies and fatigue, God's people continued in their labor to repair the walls of Jerusalem. With what words did Nehemiah encourage the people (Nehemiah 4:14)?

October Week 2 Discussion Questions

October 5–11; Nehemiah 7–13; Esther 1–7

1. Upon hearing God's Word, the people were instructed by Nehemiah, Ezra, and the other leaders, "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). At which times in your life might these words from Nehemiah be especially meaningful to you?
2. Explain the words of Nehemiah 9:33 in light of your own life and experience.
3. Read Nehemiah 12 again. Imagine the beautiful celebration of God and His goodness. Note especially the scene described in verse 43. What future occurrence might this event remind us of? See Revelation 7:9–17.
4. What evidence does Esther 2:19–23 provide that Esther and Mordecai sought to obey God with respect to the Fourth Commandment?
5. Mordecai encouraged Queen Esther with the words, "And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Apply these words to your own life. What opportunities do you have to serve God at "such a time as this"?
6. To approach the king uninvited in ancient Persia was to risk death. Yet when Esther came before the king under such conditions, the king was pleased with her and welcomed her into his presence, asking what request he might grant her (Esther 5:1–3). Under what conditions does God similarly welcome us before His throne of grace? See Hebrews 4:14–16. Ultimately, Esther made her request on behalf of her people. What requests on behalf of others can you make today in Jesus' name?

October Week 3 Discussion Questions

October 12–18; Esther 8–10; Job 1–10

1. Review Esther 8–10. Acting upon Esther's request, King Ahasuerus granted God's people rights and privileges in his kingdom. What rights and privileges in God's eternal kingdom are ours through faith in Christ Jesus? See Galatians 4:5–7.
2. Describe Job's approach to life as you consider his words in Job 1:21.
3. Explain Job's words recorded in Job 2:10 in light of Hebrews 12:5–11.
4. Why do you think Christians sometimes face periods of hardship, illness, and disappointment with the same type of reasoning that Job's friend Eliphaz uses in Job 4:3–8?
5. Compare Job 6:14–15 to the directive of God's Word found in Galatians 6:1–2. How can we, as God's people, faithfully serve our friends during their times of spiritual struggle or disillusionment?
6. How does Romans 5:17–21 answer the question Job asked in Job 9:2?

October Week 4 Discussion Questions

October 19–25; Job 11–24

1. To what qualities of the almighty God does Zophar refer (Job 11:7–9)? Compare Zophar's words with those of Paul in Ephesians 3:18–19.
2. Contrast the description of our natural human condition in Job 14:1 with God's will for those who belong to Him through faith in Christ Jesus as described in 2 Corinthians 5:15.
3. Job's words in Job 16:19–22 remind us of Romans 8:26–27. Who promises to intercede for the people of God when we, like Job of old, feel weak and incapable?
4. Explain Job's confession of faith in Job 19:25–27.
5. Consider Job's description of the wicked in Job 21:7–16. According to Matthew 5:43–48, how would God have us treat the unrighteous?
6. In Job 23:10, Job observes, "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come out as gold." What perspective on human suffering does 1 Peter 1:3–7 provide?

October Week 5 Discussion Questions

October 26–31; Job 25–42

1. Job 28:20–28 records Job's thoughts on wisdom. Identify the core of true wisdom for the believer. See 1 Corinthians 1:30.
2. Review Job 29–31. Under Christ-controlled conditions, suffering can set off a chain of events that helps us grow as God's children. But suffering itself cannot do that. What does? See Romans 5:3–5.
3. Each of us can relate to the words of Job 33:27, "I sinned and perverted what was right, and it was not repaid to me." See Romans 5:17–19 and explain.
4. Consider the following words of Elihu to Job, "If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against Him? And if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him?" (Job 35:6). See 1 Corinthians 15:3.
5. Reflect on the introductory words of God's response to Job (Job 38:2–7) in light of a similar theme found in Isaiah 55:6–11. What conclusion can we draw about God even as we consider His greatness and magnificent power?
6. Comment on Job's reply to the Lord (Job 42:1–2) in light of God's plans for you and for your salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

November Week 1 Discussion Questions

November 1–8; Psalms 1–41

1. Psalm 1 seems to speak to those who are about to choose a path in life: “the way of sinners” (1:1) or “the way of the righteous” (1:6). Identify the characteristics of those who follow each path. What comfort does the Lord, through the psalmist, give to those who follow the way of the righteous?
2. Psalm 2 pictures God as a King who is installing His Son as co-ruler on the throne. Subject rulers, however, are threatening revolt. Why does the Lord laugh (2:4)? What warning and advice does the King give to those threatening revolt (2:5, 10, 12)? What does it mean to “kiss the Son” (2:12)?
3. In the span of Psalms 3 to 11, David seems to operate in a cycle of worrying and complaining, then trusting and rejoicing. He worries about threats to himself (3:1), the unfaithfulness of the people (4:2), and threats to the throne (7:4). Interspersed through these worries are expressions of joyful trust in the Lord’s protection (3:3; 7:10; 9:1–2; 11:7). What other passages in these psalms indicate this cycle? Our walk in life is much like David’s. Which verses bring you comfort that the Lord will deal with our worries and complaints out of His great love for us, His people?
4. Elections are upon us. Concerns for what lies ahead are to be expected. What hope can you draw from these promises of God in Psalms 12:5–7; 13:3–5; 16:5–6; 17:6–7?
5. Psalms 18 and 19 seem to form one great song in which David praises God for using His might and strength to protect and care for His people. Identify and explain several pictures of God’s strength in these two psalms that bring you comfort and joy.
6. What is your favorite game to play? What is your favorite vacation spot? All of us have favorites. Psalms 23–28 contain Bible passages that have become favorites of many people. Look at these passages: Psalm 23:1; 24:7; 25:7; 26:8; 27:1; 28:7. What is the message of each one? What makes them favorites? Of these psalms, what is your favorite passage? Explain why it is especially meaningful to you.
7. Psalms 29–34 mention many blessings that God has given His people. In Christ, we are these saints (Psalm 34:9), children (34:11), and righteous (34:19) who are the recipients of those blessings. Identify some blessings of God that, in Christ, are especially meaningful to you. Here are some verses to get you started: 29:11; 30:2; 31:21–22; 32:5; 33:4–5; 34:17–18. Use a circle prayer to thank God for your many blessings in Christ.
8. David is the author of Psalms 35–41. In them, we see David as a real human being, like us. He anguishes over the plots and skulduggery that his enemies use against him and asks God to pay them back (35:1–8). He is burdened by the horrible sins that people can commit (36:4), and he shudders at his own sin (38:5–8). Yet he turns it all over to God. Read and discuss these passages to let God’s Word help you when you share David’s feelings: Psalm 35:22; 36:5–6; 37:1–4; 38:15, 21–22; 39:7–8; 40:4; 41:13.

November Week 2 Discussion Questions

November 9–15; Psalms 42–77

1. Psalms 42 and 43 form one prayer, and they have a common refrain (Psalm 42:5, 11; Psalm 43:5). Make a prayer list from the concerns of your group, and use this refrain after laying each concern before the Lord in prayer. Rejoice in the promises of God that your prayers will be answered just as surely as Christ is risen from the dead.

2. What's your favorite riddle? The psalmist presents a riddle in Psalm 49: Why should I fear when evil days come and the wicked surround us (v. 5)? What reasons for not fearing does he present in the rest of the psalm? One answer to the riddle comes in Psalm 52:8. How would you state the psalmist's answer of faith? What support do you find for your answer in Psalms 48–53 and elsewhere in Scripture?

3. Many people are weighed down by misfortunes—several serious health issues, broken relationships, job-related difficulties—and the load seems to get heavier by the day. What difficulties weigh down people you know? David felt that he was surrounded by enemies and evildoers. (See especially Psalm 59.) He was weighed down by his own sin. Which sections of Psalms 54–60 indicate that God was his source of strength and hope? Which verses give you hope and strength when you are surrounded by difficulties?

4. When children are in trouble and need help, what do they look for in the person to whom they turn for help? When you face trouble and difficulty, what do you look for in the person to whom you turn for help? When David was in trouble and looking for help, what did he see in God that brought him comfort (Psalm 62:11–12)? As you look at Psalms 61–66, find other verses that speak of these two attributes of God and explain to one another the comfort and joy these words of God bring.

5. One of the great confessions of faith in all of Scripture is Psalm 68:19–20. Take time to relate various parts of these verses to statements in the Apostles' Creed and Luther's explanations in the Small Catechism.

6. How do you think the rich and the famous live? Which TV shows seem to indicate that we envy the rich and famous? Asaph, the psalmist, confesses that he “nearly slipped” into the trap of envying such people (Psalm 73:2–3). How does he describe them (73:4–9, 12)? What did he feel was the result of his following God's ways (73:13–14, 21–22)? How did the psalmist get out of his despair (73:17, 23–26)? What is the psalmist's message for us when we think others, especially the rich and famous, have it better than us?

November Week 3 Discussion Questions

November 16–22; Psalms 78–113

1. Some have called Psalm 78 a psalm of history. What history is recalled in this psalm? What pattern did the psalmist see in this history (Psalm 78:32–38)? Others have called this a psalm of Christian education. What is the purpose of Christian education (78:3–8)? Yet this is a psalm about God. Time after time, God acted to save and redeem His people. The psalmist concludes by speaking of God's choosing of David to be the servant and shepherd of His people. How is David a picture of Jesus, the promised Messiah (Matthew 2:6; John 10:11; Revelation 7:17)? Today, include the Church in your prayers, especially the Lutheran schools and high schools, Sunday Schools, day-care and Midweek programs, and all Bible classes. Be sure to include the seminaries and the schools in the Concordia University System as well.
2. Are you longing for the weekend? Or are you longing to go to church on Sunday? What's the difference? In Psalm 84, the psalmist longs to go to church. Identify some of the things that the psalmist anticipates. What are some of the blessings you receive from your participation in worship (Acts 2:42; 5:42; 11:28–30; 20:7; Colossians 3:12–17; 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4)? Thank God for the blessings and the opportunities to worship with fellow Christians.
3. How many pictures of security in God can you find in Psalm 91? Identify and explain them. Which one is most meaningful to you? Why?
4. The group of psalms for your reading today (Psalms 96–101) is wonderful set of songs. All of them call on us to praise God. Identify several phrases in each psalm that are calls to praise Him. Now search these psalms for reasons to praise God. You'll have a short but powerful list of reasons to join the angels (and your fellow congregation members this weekend!) in praise to God.
5. Psalms 90–106 form the fourth book in the Psalms. Fifteen of the sixteen psalms in this book are psalms of praise, but Psalm 102 is the prayer of a lonely, afflicted person. What are some of the concerns of this person? Perhaps you are similar to this person, living in a time when there are so many reasons to praise God, yet you feel burdened. Which burdens of the person who wrote this psalm are especially close to your heart? What brought hope to this person? (See Psalm 102:12–13, 16–17, 25–27.) Isaiah had similar concerns and similar hope (Isaiah 51:6, 8). Ultimately, Christ is our salvation (John 11:25). Praise Him as you pray Psalms 103–106.
6. During this month, we celebrate our national Thanksgiving Day. It's a time to take notice of what God has done and "consider the steadfast love of the LORD" as the psalmist says (107:43). Identify some things God has done by looking at these sections of Psalm 107: verses 4–9, 10–16, 17–22, 23–32, and 33–41. Then, give some examples of how God has continued His blessings in our own time. Finally, what should we do with this knowledge (107:1–2, 42–43)?

November Week 4 Discussion Questions

November 23–29; Psalms 114–143

1. Hold on a second! Don't pass it by! This week's readings include the shortest psalm—in fact, the shortest chapter in the Bible—Psalm 117. It may be short, but it proclaims a very important truth. *The Lutheran Study Bible* notes: “[Psalm 117] celebrates God's grace, which began in Israel but is extended to all nations through Christ” (*TLSB*, p. 961). Paul makes this point also. Read Romans 15:8–9. When did Christ become a servant of the Jews to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs (Matthew 15:24; Romans 3:1–2, 21–26; Galatians 3:6–9)? What blessings do we who are Gentiles have as a result of God keeping His promises to the Jewish patriarchs? Why, then, does the psalmist call on all nations and all peoples to praise the Lord? Sing the *Nunc Dimittis* (*LSB*, p. 165) as your own song of praise for your salvation in Christ Jesus.

2. As you read Psalm 119, ask yourself, What seems to be a great concern of the person who wrote the psalm? See 119:5, 9, 33, 67, 86–88, 125, 133, 145. What is another concern that the writer has? See 119:6, 22, 25, 51, 61, 69, 85, 110, 121, 134, 150, 157. In spite of his desire to live according to God's laws, what is the psalmist's conclusion (v. 176)? He realizes, by God's grace, that his salvation will be a reality only if the Lord will “seek [His] servant” (v. 176). The psalmist and you can take great comfort in the fact that the Lord has sought us out to forgive and redeem us (Psalm 119:41; Luke 19:10).

3. Many people have a lot going on these days: Thanksgiving activities, Advent services, Christmas preparations, end-of-year financial matters. There will be a lot of coming and going. Today, read and meditate especially on Psalm 121. Find and comment on the phrases that assure you that God will be with you and help you, even with all the coming and going. Then pray or sing this prayer:

Jesus, guard and guide Thy members,
Fill them with Thy boundless grace,
Hear their prayers in ev'ry place.
Fan to flame faith's glowing embers;
Grant all Christians, far and near,
Holy peace, a glad new year!
LSB 897:4

4. Today, we finish praying the ascent psalms, Psalms 120–134, the prayers prayed as the people traveled to the temple in Jerusalem. The Old Testament practice of singing psalms during travel raises the question, What psalms verses might I say and discuss as I travel? Encourage members of your group to choose verses from Psalms 120–134 that would be useful to discuss and use as prayers during travel. Discuss several of their choices.

5. Ask your group these questions: What are your treasured possessions? How do you treat these treasured possessions? What do you do with them? After some discussion, search Psalm 135 together for answers to these questions: What are God's treasured possessions? How does He treat them? What does He do with them? What does the psalmist call on the Lord's “possessions” to do? How might we Christians do this?

6. The topic of people being searched is often in the news. Police search people. Police dogs search people and their baggage at airports. Customs agents search people and their vehicles. Detectives search people for evidence. In these situations, the people being searched are usually not volunteering to be searched. Read Psalm 139. Here, the psalmist first acknowledges that God has searched him (v. 1). Then he asks God to search him again (vv. 23–24). According to the psalmist, how well does God know him? Is the psalmist bothered by God's searching? Why or why not? Why does the psalmist invite God to search him again (vv. 23–24)? What is the way everlasting? (See Psalm 16:9–11; Acts 2:31; John 14:6; Acts 16:17, 31.) Would you be bothered if God searched you? Explain your answer. Even the soul with the most to hide can be sure of the Lord's forgiveness through Jesus, our Savior (Ephesians 2:3–5).

November Week 5 Discussion Questions

November 30; Psalms 144–150

1. “Praise the Lord” is the frequent refrain of the psalmist in the last six psalms. Make a list of several attributes of God mentioned in these psalms for which the psalmist praises God. Then check and discuss the attributes that are especially meaningful to you. To close your session, join the psalmist in praising God by reading Psalm 150 aloud.

December Week 1 Discussion Questions

December 1–6; Proverbs 1–7

1. Solomon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7). What is the “fear of the LORD”? (See Ecclesiastes 12:13; Psalm 111:10; 112:1; 1 Peter 3:15.) Nicodemus was a wise man who wanted to be taught by Jesus. Jesus taught him the truth (John 3:11), the essence of which was the Gospel (John 3:16). How is John 3:21 related to the fear of the Lord? How might we show that we fear the Lord? How is this passage related to Christian education?
2. As you read and meditate on Proverbs 2 and 3, remember that the wisdom spoken of here is wisdom from God (Proverbs 2:6) and wisdom that fears the Lord (1:7). It is wisdom that proceeds from faith in Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Make a list of the blessings that Solomon says such godly wisdom brings to people. How does godly wisdom protect a person? Identify and discuss several things that a person with godly wisdom will do. Pray that you can live a life that exhibits godly wisdom.
3. In Proverbs 4, Solomon says that his father, David, taught him something important that he now wanted his own children to really absorb (vv. 3–4). What was this important bit of “sound learning” (v. 2)? See verses 14, 23, and 27. What experiences did David have that would make this message so important to him that he would want Solomon to really remember it? See 1 Samuel 16:7, 12; 18:1–4, 17–19; 23:1–5; 24:3–7; 2 Samuel 11:1–5, 14; 13:22. How is Solomon’s message applicable to us today? When we fall, what is the Lord’s Word to us through Peter, another who failed in this respect (1 Peter 2:24)?
4. Continuing his message from Proverbs 4, Solomon in Proverbs 5 and 6 amplifies the message he evidently received from his father, David: do not become involved in adultery. David knew from his own experience the damage that adultery can do. What is some of the damage adultery causes? See Proverbs 5:9–12; 6:25–29, 32. By God’s grace, Solomon says, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth” (5:18). God does not want the wonderful gift of our sexuality and our sexual relationship with our spouse ruined by illicit and adulterous relationships. How does God describe the close relationships He does want us to have (Ephesians 5:22–32)? Pray that all marriages may reflect the love that God has for His Church.
5. In Proverbs 7, Solomon further describes both the cunning ways in which Satan works to tempt us and the damage that he causes to our lives. And Satan works this way with every sin, not just adultery. Perhaps members of your group have experienced these kinds of satanic attacks in their own lives or know of people who have. What happens when we are seduced with Satan’s smooth talk (Proverbs 7:21)? God, in Christ Jesus, has already provided a rescue. Solomon points us in the right direction (Proverbs 3:5–6; 6:3). What does the Lord promise through Isaiah (Isaiah 1:18) and through Hosea, who himself had to deal with an adulterous wife and adulterous Israel (Hosea 13:4, 14; 14:4)? How does Paul describe God’s action on our behalf when we are alienated from Him (Colossians 1:21–22)? Rejoice with your group in the bountiful mercy of our God, who forgives all our sins. You may want to use the words of the Advent song, “O Bride of Christ, Rejoice” (*LSB* 335).

December Week 2 Discussion Questions

December 7–13; Proverbs 8–19

1. Some commentators consider Proverbs 8:22–31 to be the most significant portion of the book because it speaks of wisdom as being an aspect of God's nature and as participating in the creation of the world (Proverbs 8:27, 30). How is John's description of Jesus, the Word, similar to this description of wisdom in Proverbs? See especially Proverbs 8:23 and John 1:1; Proverbs 8:30 and John 1:18. Paul speaks of Jesus as "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). How is Christ the "wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:20–31)? Following your discussion, praise Jesus using the words of verses 5 and 6 of the hymn "One Thing's Needful" (*LSB* 536) and pray its petition "Through all my life's pilgrimage, guard and uphold me, In loving forgiveness, O Jesus, enfold me."
2. Solomon concludes this first section of Proverbs by placing Wisdom (Proverbs 9:1–12) and Folly (9:13–18) side by side in order to compare and contrast them. Folly tries to imitate Wisdom in order to gain more followers. Explain some of the similarities between the two. Then explain the differences. Summarize Wisdom's message.
3. For many years, the sign-off line of a news commentator was "That's the way it is." Many of the proverbs in Proverbs 10–11 are like that. Choose a few proverbs and discuss how what is said is just how it works out in life, for good or ill. Select your own proverbs to discuss, but try these also: Proverbs 10:7, 32; 11:10, 12. Now look at a few proverbs that specifically talk about God. For example, look at Proverbs 10:22, 29; 11:1, 20–21. How would you summarize the messages of these proverbs concerning God? What might the apostle Paul say concerning Proverbs 11:21? See Romans 3:10–12, 21–24; 6:18; Galatians 5:1.
4. "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are His delight" (Proverbs 12:22). In the light of passages like Psalm 14:3 and 1 John 1:8, how can Solomon make such a statement? Look at other similar statements: Proverbs 11:1, 20; 8:31. What is the function of these statements? When does the Lord delight in us?
5. Review Proverbs 14–15. What makes a person righteous? See Romans 10:1–13. Find and discuss several of the descriptions of the righteous in these chapters of Proverbs. How does Solomon describe a righteous person? How does Paul describe the redeemed person? See Galatians 5:1, 13, 22–23. The joy of our redemption shows itself in how we live. That's just the way Christians are. Thank God for this kind of joy and life.
6. There are several "sad but true" statements in this section of Proverbs. Discuss a few of these, such as Proverbs 16:28; 17:28; 18:2; 19:7. The fate of the perverse person, the fool, and those who shun the poor will be the same as that of the false witness (Proverbs 19:5). What is the most significant fact about this? See Psalm 14:3 and Isaiah 64:6. Where is our protection from this situation (Proverbs 18:10; Galatians 3:13)? What is the comfort that the coming Savior brings? See *LSB* 347:1–2.

December Week 3 Discussion Questions

December 14–20; Proverbs 20–31

1. “He’s making a list and checking it twice.” These are familiar lyrics for this season of the year. This warning is the same as that of Proverbs 20:11. What is the warning? What information do verses 9 and 27 add to this warning? Unfortunately, we can’t improve our lot with the Lord by being good or nice. Now read Proverbs 20:30 and respond by saying, “Christ did this for me!” Many of our sins and their consequences are mentioned in the verses of Proverbs 20 and 21. Discuss a few of them. Only through the Lord’s Christ and His power can our sin be overcome. Now read the last words of Proverbs 21:31 and thank the Lord for His gift of a Savior.

2. It is good to examine why we do things that are routine or a longtime habit. Just because “we’ve always done it” does not make it bad; we just need to make sure we know *why* we do things so that we can do them well. Consider Christian education. Why do you read and study *Today’s Light*? Why does your church conduct a Sunday School or have Bible classes? Why do congregations dedicate so many resources to Lutheran schools or to colleges and seminaries? Review some of the reasons for having these programs with your group. Then look at Proverbs 22:19. What is the reason for Christian education that Solomon gives here? There are several other Christian education passages in this section of Proverbs. What do the following verses have to say about why Christian education is so important: Proverbs 22:6; 23:12, 17, 23? Also consult these passages: Proverbs 16:6; 14:26–27; 9:10. Conclude your study by praying for all the agencies of Christian education in your church and the people involved. Inquire if there is some way you might help at one of these agencies of Christian education.

3. “It’s not what you say but how you say it that’s important.” What does Proverbs 25:11–18 say about this statement? What does the Lord want us to be very diligent about saying (see Jonah 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Matthew 28:19–20; 1 Timothy 4:9–13; 2 Timothy 1:8–10; Colossians 4:2–6)?

4. Proverbs 26 and 27 are not uplifting chapters. Solomon shows Proverbs 27:19 to be true by giving negative examples. Look at Proverbs 26 and describe the types of people described there. Identify what Solomon says is so bad about each one. Unfortunately, we are all like the people described. Only God can remove the stain that we all bear. Comment on God’s Word of forgiveness in these passages: 2 Corinthians 5:14–21; Ephesians 2:1–10. Then pray for His forgiveness and new life.

5. To reflect on Proverbs 28 and 29, do the opposite of what you did with Proverbs 26 and 27: list some of the characteristics of the righteous person and some of the things a righteous person does. Remember that the truly righteous person is made so through the forgiveness we have in Christ and is empowered to live the righteous life by the Holy Spirit. Read Colossians 1:10–14 together. What are some aspects of living a life “worthy of the Lord” that Paul describes? How has the Father qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints? Join your fellow believers in praising God for giving you this gift through His Son by singing the Advent carol “Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord” (LSB 352).

6. The last two chapters of Proverbs are proverbs of two other writers, Agur and Lemuel. They also could serve as a final word to the reader. What is the message of each? What would be the content of your own prayer after you have completed a reading of Proverbs?

December Week 4 Discussion Questions

December 21–27; Ecclesiastes 1–12

1. Discuss your thoughts on Ecclesiastes 1 and 2. What things had the Preacher tried that he found meaningless? What makes these things meaningless? Even though the Preacher found them meaningless, does that mean these things are without value? Read 1 John 2:1–2, 15–17. John comes to the same conclusion as the Preacher. What is his treasure? After your discussion, ask the Lord to strengthen your trust in His meaningful treasure.
2. In Ecclesiastes 3 and 4, we are given several hints to the solution for meaningless. Identify the aspects of the solution mentioned in these verses: Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, 12–14, 17–18; 4:9–12. What did the angel announce as the great solution to these problems (Luke 2:10–11)? What is Peter's confession about what is meaningful (John 6:68)?
3. Check out Luke 2:8–20. What did the shepherds say at the manger? What did they say after they had visited the manger? They seem to have followed the instruction of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes 5:1–3. Why does the Preacher say we should not “let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God”? According to the Preacher, who is running things? How might this insight help us celebrate Christmas with peace and joy?
4. Better is “the day of death than the day of birth” (Ecclesiastes 7:1). What a statement to think about at Christmas time! Why would a Christian say this? Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 and Philippians 1:21–23. Why does Solomon feel this way? Who offers more hope, Solomon or Paul?
5. “The same event happens to all” (Ecclesiastes 9:3). What is this “destiny” that overtakes all, according to the Preacher? It especially distresses Solomon that those who do good and those who do evil suffer the same fate. He mentions the fate of the poor man who saved a city as an example (9:13–16). In the light of what he has observed, what does Solomon suggest are some things people could do in the meantime? (See 9:7, 9–10; 10:4, 19.) In reality, what truth is Solomon teaching (Romans 3:23)? What is God's joyous solution to this situation (Romans 3:22–25)?
6. After contemplating all the seeming inconsistencies and injustices in the world, what does the Preacher finally conclude (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6, 13)? This is a passionate plea, not just good advice. Read the whole context (11:10–12:5a). What is the essence of the first plea? What is the essence of the second plea (12:5b–7)? Solomon says his proverbs were written to be “goads” given by the Shepherd so that his readers would “fear God and keep His commandments” (12:11, 13). What is a goad? Which goads have been especially helpful to you? Since goads hurt, read these words of the Shepherd for healing (John 10:11, 14–16) and the assurances of Peter (1 Peter 5:4). Then praise God for His love and everlasting care.

December Week 5 Discussion Questions

December 28–31; Song of Solomon 1–8

1. An “adjuration” is a solemn oath urging or advising someone to do a certain thing. A familiar example of an adjuration is the judge’s directive “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.” Song of Solomon 2:7 is an adjuration that is repeated in 3:5 and 8:4 and, in a different form, in 5:8. It is a statement of both Law and Gospel. What are people (the daughters of Jerusalem) placed under oath to do? What law of God is it stating (Exodus 20:14)? Through the phrase “by the gazelles or the does of the field,” the adjuration invokes the witness of God. It calls to mind that God created things to be done in a certain order. The adjuration also reminds us that by following this command we are responding to the love of God that is a mighty flame of the Lord (Song of Solomon 8:6). To what contemporary situations does the adjuration speak? How did God most clearly show His love to us?

2. Solomon describes his wife-to-be in Song of Solomon 4:1–7, she describes him after their marriage in Song of Solomon 5:10–16, and he describes her after their marriage in Song of Solomon 6:4–9. What do these descriptions say about their love for each other? How are they a fitting description of Christ’s love for His Bride, the Church, and the Church’s love for Christ? See Ephesians 5.

3. Review Song of Solomon 7–8. The Lutheran marriage liturgy describes marriage as “an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God . . . a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church” (*LSB*, p. 275). The marriage of Solomon and the Shulammitte is a picture of Christ’s relationship to the Church (Ephesians 5:23–25; Colossians 1:18). How do Christian marriages depict the relationship between Christ and the Church? In your closing prayers, thank God for Christian marriages and pray that God would strengthen their witness to His love for all people.

4. Song of Solomon 8:6 has been called the theological highlight of the book. What is the Shulammitte asking Solomon to do? How would we express a similar request today? Since the Shulammitte is a symbol for the Church and Solomon is a symbol for Christ, how does Christ fulfill this request for the Church today? See Acts 2:38–39 and Ephesians 1:13–14.

Then read these three passages, one after the other: Song of Solomon 8:14; 1 Corinthians 16:22b; Revelation 22:20. How are these passages similar in their request? How is the picture of the Shulammitte, perhaps after being married many years, wanting to experience the love of Solomon yet again, a glorious picture of the Christian’s anticipation of Christ’s return on the Last Day?

Leader Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

October Week 1 Leader Notes

October 1–4; Nehemiah 1–6

1. Nehemiah describes God's people thus: "They are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand" (Nehemiah 1:10). God's people are His servants. God established the relationship. He made them His people. He continued to act effectively on their behalf, preserving and saving them, just as when He delivered them from oppression in Egypt.
2. Nehemiah motivated the people with a reminder of God's gracious hand upon the labor they were about to undertake.
3. Nehemiah encouraged the people, reminding them of God's attributes and of the importance of their mission as they faced their enemies. He said, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes" (Nehemiah 4:14).

October Week 2 Leader Notes

October 5–11; Nehemiah 7–13; Esther 1–7

1. No matter what circumstance or situation we, the people of God, may find ourselves in, we can know true joy that Jesus is our Savior from sin, death, and Satan's power—and we find strength in that joy.
2. In contrast to human fallibility and unfaithfulness, our God is faithful. His love and desire to save us and to make of us a people dedicated to Him in Christ Jesus never fades or changes. His promises to us are ever sure.
3. The celebration of the people, complete with beautiful choirs and resounding praise and rejoicing, reminds us of heaven, where we will never cease to praise God for His grace and goodness to us through Jesus, our Lord and Savior.
4. Esther honored her guardian Mordecai's request that she keep her family background and nationality a secret. Mordecai honored the government that held his people captive by reporting to Esther the plot to assassinate the king as he had become aware of it.
5. Answers will vary. Comment that as we seek God's guidance and direction in our lives, He will provide us with opportunities to serve Him.
6. Because we have Jesus as our high priest, and because He, as true God yet true man, can sympathize with our weaknesses, we can approach God's throne of grace with confidence. Here, we will find mercy and grace in our time of need. Examples of requests will vary.

October Week 3 Leader Notes

October 12–18; Esther 8–10; Job 1–10

1. In Christ Jesus, God has made us sons and heirs of His kingdom. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we have the forgiveness of sins, new life, and the inheritance of an eternal home in heaven.
2. Job's words indicate his willingness to yield to the Almighty as the one who rules over all things. He praises God for the life cycle He provides him.
3. God uses the hardship and troubles in our life to discipline (disciple) us as His dear children. Through our life's events, He works for our good so that we may share in His holiness. Through discipline, He produces in us a harvest of righteousness and peace.
4. When troubles, hardships, and burdens come into the life of a believer, a sense of fairness often causes us to ask, "How could these things happen to someone who has tried so hard to love and obey God?" Human nature suggests to us that we should always get what we think we have earned. Eliphaz observes, "Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (Job 4:8).
5. During his time of trouble, Job's friends were no help or comfort to him. Galatians 6:1–2 encourages us, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."
6. Job's question, "But how can a man be in the right before God?" (Job 9:2), is answered for us by Paul: "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17). Jesus' righteousness is God's gift to us through faith in Christ Jesus.

October Week 4 Leader Notes

October 19–25; Job 11–24

1. Zophar refers to the omniscient (all-knowing) quality of God. Paul speaks of expansive dimensions in his description of Christ's love. Paul says that to know this love surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:18–19).
2. In contrast to Job's description of our natural human condition—"Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1)—Paul writes, "And He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:15). God in Christ blesses His children with a newness of life and purpose.
3. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26–27). These words provide special comfort to those belonging to God through Christ Jesus, those who in the depths of despair, grief, or sickness are not able to pray or focus on their prayer.
4. Job prophesies about the resurrection of the body in these beautiful words: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25–27). Jesus is the great Redeemer, who has defeated death for us and who will raise us back to life on the Last Day.
5. Just as God extends His temporal blessings to all people, including those who do not love and believe in Him, His power moves His children to love all people, including our enemies. By God's grace and through the Holy Spirit at work through God's Word, these unbelievers may also become believers and, by God's grace, our brothers and sisters in Christ.
6. 1 Peter 1:6–7 records, "Now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." These words remind us that God works in our lives through Word and Sacrament. He strengthens our faith even as we face and endure the trials of life, proving it genuine to the end that we will praise, glorify, and honor God when He comes again to free us forever from all suffering and trial.

October Week 5 Leader Notes

October 26–31; Job 25–42

1. “Christ Jesus . . . became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Christ is the ultimate source of truth. Through faith in Him, we receive all we need—His blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation.
2. The chain of events described in Romans 5:3–5 is this: suffering—endurance—character—hope. But it is the Holy Spirit who plants and nurtures that Gospel hope. Without the Holy Spirit working in the heart, suffering can produce despair, anger, bitterness, and other evils. There is nothing sacred or holy about suffering itself. Only God can use suffering for His sacred and holy purposes.
3. We deserve nothing but punishment because of our sins. But because of His grace and mercy, God sent His Son to live and die in our place. Because of His payment for our sins, we receive the blessings that are His. We did not get what we deserved—Jesus took what we deserved upon Himself so that we might receive the blessings of Christ, which we did not deserve.
4. Our sins affected God greatly. The pain, torment, and humiliation Jesus endured during His suffering and death occurred as the result of our sins. Our sins caused His suffering.
5. We can trust that almighty God, whose ways are far beyond our human ability to understand or comprehend, desires to shower us with His grace and mercy. His Word is the means through which He brings these blessings to us.
6. God’s plan to save us by grace through faith in Jesus is sure and certain. As Job assures us, “No purpose of [God’s] can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).

November Week 1 Leader Notes

November 1–8; Psalms 1–41

1. Characteristics of those following “the way of sinners” would be that they are weak and follow any sinful suggestion that comes their way. They cannot withstand temptation (1:4). Ultimately, those who walk the way of the wicked will perish (1:5). Those who follow “the way of the righteous” love God’s law and meditate on it faithfully. Their comfort is that they are blessed by God and receive His protection (1:6). Stress that the way of the righteous is ours through faith in Christ Jesus.
2. The Lord laughs (Psalm 2:4) because He knows these upstart “rulers” (2:3) cannot prevent Him from establishing His kingdom at Jerusalem, through David, nor from placing His Son on the throne as the promised Messiah. The job is done (2:6). Note the similarity between Psalm 2:7 and Matthew 3:17. The King warns them not to revolt or they will be destroyed (Psalm 2:12). He urges them to serve Him (2:11). “Kiss the Son” has the connotation of serving the Son and being in submission to Him rather than revolting against Him. This psalm is a comfort to us. God has established His plan for our salvation through His Son, Jesus. Nothing can keep Him from accomplishing His plan for our salvation.
3. Many sections of these psalms could be chosen to illustrate the worries and concerns that David had. We have similar concerns today. There are also many sections that could be chosen that indicate God’s help for His people. Have participants in the group choose and discuss several verses that describe the worries people have; then choose and discuss several verses that indicate that God acts to help and protect His people. Note that Hebrews 2:5–10 applies Psalm 8:4–6 to Jesus, who suffered and died that all believers in Him might have salvation.
4. Have your group identify a few concerns they may have about the elections. Then use the suggested psalm verses to address those concerns. In Psalm 12:5–7, God promises to act on behalf of the oppressed and the needy. In Psalm 13:3–5, the psalmist rejoices in the love and salvation that he is confident God has already accomplished for him. This is the same salvation that we have through Jesus, who suffered, died, and rose to save us from sin and death. Psalm 16:5–6 helps us recall that God has given us many blessings already; under His blessing we are secure. In Psalm 17:6–7, David expresses his confidence that God answers his prayers by showing the wonder of His great love. We, too, can be confident that God will listen and answer our prayers in a way that shows His great love.
5. These psalms contain many pictures of God’s strength that members of your group may choose to explain. The pictures of the Lord as rock and fortress (18:2) depict God as a place of safety. The picture of the Lord as shield portrays God as one who acts to protect His people from the dangers posed especially by sin, death, and the devil. Psalm 19:1 reminds us that the whole earth declares God’s glory and that His law is perfect (19:7). God is the one to whom we go for the power to keep us from “presumptuous sins” (19:13). All of these things lead David to praise God for being his rock and redeemer (19:14).

6. Each person in your group will have their own favorite passage. Allow time for members of your group to share the comfort, hope, and strength they receive from these sections of God's Word. Each of the passages, in some way, assures us that God acts to protect, rescue, and save His people. This is done most notably in the salvation God has provided for us through His Son, Jesus, our loving Shepherd, who has suffered and died for us and rose again with strength to help us and bring us joy (Psalm 28:7).

7. Help your group members identify the many blessings they have in Christ. Foster a spirit of thankfulness and joy in your group. The psalm writers either allude to or mention directly a great many blessings that God showers on His people, including giving strength and peace (29:11) that we have through the forgiveness of sins, healing (30:2), protection in troubled times (31:21–22), forgiveness (32:5), steadfast love (33:4–5), and deliverance from troubles (34:19). Explore these psalms for additional blessings. Thank God for all of His blessings in a group prayer.

8. Help your group acknowledge that all of us would like to tell God how to solve the world's problems. Like David, all of us want God to get rid of our own personal enemies. Explore the passages to let God's Word guide you to turn all of these frustrations over to God, "who delights in the welfare of His servant" (Psalm 35:27), who is righteous and just (36:6), and who is the one to whom we go for help and salvation (38:22; 39:8). Then praise Him for His care and deliverance (41:13).

November Week 2 Leader Notes

November 9–15; Psalms 42–77

1. It is not uncommon in the Psalms that the people thank God for answering a prayer that has just been prayed. In other words, our thanks follows the request immediately, for “none who wait for [the Lord] shall be put to shame” (Psalm 25:3). We can rejoice especially in the sure hope of our salvation, for Christ is “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), for God “has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him” (Colossians 1:22).

2. Here’s a riddle to get you started: Why are teddy bears never hungry? They’re stuffed. The riddle posed by the psalmist is decidedly more serious. The answer: I need not be afraid because God will take care of things as He has always done. People and problems will pass away, so we need not fear them. Even our sin that weighs us down from birth (Psalm 51:5) is absolved by our gracious God (1 Corinthians 6:11), as it was for David (2 Samuel 12:13).

3. In several sections of Psalms 54–60, David expressed his faith and confidence in God as he was weighed down by evil and enemies. Encourage your group to discuss several of these sections and share the strength the Lord gives through His Word. Our basic prayer, in the words of David, is Psalm 54:1: “O God, save me.” David expresses his confidence in God when he says, “Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life” (54:4). Other sections of psalms that your group might cite include the following: 55:16–19, 22; 56:3, 10–11; 57:3; 59:9–10.

4. When he had difficulties, David wanted and needed a God who was strong and loving (Psalm 62:11–12). Children look for these qualities in parents and teachers. Adults look for these qualities in doctors and governmental leaders. We depend on people who are strong (capable) and loving. Only God is perfectly strong and loving. These portions of this group of psalms reiterate this point: 63:3, 7; 65:3, 5; 66:16. In Christ, we have the only perfectly capable and loving one who saves us (Romans 5:6–8; Ephesians 2:4–9).

5. For a New Testament Christian, this Old Testament statement takes on New Testament meanings. The term “GOD, the Lord” becomes a reference to the one true God who created the heavens and the earth. The references to “God . . . our salvation” and “a God of salvation” remind us of Jesus, our Savior from sin and death. The psalmist’s words that God our Savior “daily bears us up” and that from the Lord “belong deliverances from death” echo Luther’s explanation of the Second Article.

6. Many see TV shows and news reports of the lavish lifestyles of rich and famous people. The popularity of such shows, many of which your group members can identify and perhaps even enjoy watching, indicates that there is some envy present in our hearts. Comments such as “I don’t know what it’s like to be rich, but I’d sure like to try it sometime” are indicative of this envy also. It is the trap Asaph described in Psalm 73. He thought such people had no struggles, were healthy and strong, were not plagued by human ills, were violent and had callous hearts (vv. 4–7), laid claim to heaven and earth (v. 9), and they had plenty of fans (v. 10). He felt his following of God’s ways was done

in vain, a plague on him (vv. 13–14). Penitently, he described himself as grieved, embittered, senseless, ignorant, and a brute (vv. 21–22) before God. The psalmist could not get out of his despair, of course. God had to pull him out. He says God held him by the hand and guided him; he acknowledged that God was his strength (vv. 23, 26). His message for us is that it is good to be near our sovereign Lord and tell others of what He has done (v. 28). It would be well for us to join the psalmist in “the sanctuary of God” (v. 17) to receive from the Lord in Word and Sacrament His guidance and strength through the forgiveness of sins that we have in Jesus.

November Week 3 Leader Notes

November 16–22; Psalms 78–113

1. In Psalm 78, the psalmist provides a lengthy history of Israel. He recalls the countless times when Israel was unfaithful to God. In spite of this unfaithfulness, out of mercy, God rescued His people, only to have them “[sin] still more against Him” (Psalm 78:17). When God would punish them, they would call on God to rescue them, and again He would mercifully forgive them (78:32–38). God’s choosing of David to be the king is a picture of His sending of Jesus to be our Savior (Psalm 78:70–72; Matthew 2:6; John 10:11; Revelation 7:17). The psalmist calls on the people to teach this history to the children so that they do not repeat the errors of their fathers and so they remember the mercies of God in Christ Jesus; surely, this is the purpose for all Christian education. It is a mission of the Church, worthy of our support and effort. Be sure to remember all agencies and people involved in Christian education in your prayers this day.

2. There is quite a difference between longing for the weekend and longing for worship. Longing for the first means longing for time off from work, for time to do our own thing, for rest, for catching up. Longing for worship means that you look forward to gathering in God’s house with fellow believers to be strengthened through Word and Sacrament, to praise God in song and address Him in prayer with others, and to share with others the tasks of proclaiming the Gospel, helping others, teaching the Gospel to children, and forming relationships with fellow Christians. The psalmist anticipates being in God’s presence and receiving His blessing. Among the blessings we receive through worship with others are the opportunity to be taught God’s Word and the Good News of Jesus Christ, fellowship with others, the assurance of forgiveness, the Lord’s gifts received in the Sacrament, the opportunity to pray together and help others who need our help, and the strengthening of faith through the Holy Spirit. Pray and thank God for the blessings of and the opportunities to worship with fellow Christians.

3. Do you feel uneasy about what is going on in the world? Are temptations threatening to engulf you? Psalm 91 is a psalm for you. The psalmist provides nine pictures of how God provides security for us and then relates two promises of God. These pictures and promises get better and better. Among the pictures of God’s security are the following: God is a shelter (a place of protection and rest from the heated attacks of the devil), a refuge (a place of safety), a fortress (a strong-walled castle that provides safety from marauding armies), a warning about a trap (so we won’t get trapped into sin by Satan), a vaccination (to protect us from the deadly sickness of sin), a covering (like a protective mother bird’s wing), a shield (to protect from the onslaught of every temptation), a rampart (a broad, protective barrier to fortify us against any attack against our faith in Christ), and a safe dwelling (such as a tornado or bomb shelter to protect us from anything that might be thrown at us by the devil). The psalmist then says the Lord has promised to send His angels to protect us, and finally, the psalmist reminds us that God Himself promises to protect us (v. 14) and show us His salvation (v. 16), which is ours in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:31–39).

4. What wonderful acclamations of praise are contained in Psalms 96–101! Some of these acclamations are the following: “sing to the LORD,” “tell of His salvation,” and “declare

His glory” in Psalm 96; “let the earth rejoice” and “rejoice in the LORD” in Psalm 97; “sing to the LORD,” “make a joyful noise,” and “let the sea roar” in Psalm 98; “the LORD reigns” and “exalt the LORD” in Psalm 99; “make a joyful noise” and “enter His gates with thanksgiving” in Psalm 100; and “I will sing of steadfast love and justice” in Psalm 101. A sampling of reasons for this praise are magnificently stated in each psalm also: “tell of His salvation” and “He will judge the world in righteousness” in Psalm 96:2, 13; “He preserves the lives of His saints” in Psalm 97:10; “He has done marvelous things” and “worked salvation” in Psalm 98:1; “You were a forgiving God to [Israel]” in Psalm 99:8; “the LORD is good” in Psalm 100:5; and He is noted for His “steadfast love and justice” in Psalm 101:1.

5. In Psalm 102, the writer is concerned about his loneliness (v. 7), the taunts of his enemies (v. 8), the imprisonment of the people (v. 20), and, it seems to him, that God has thrown him aside (v. 10). All of this bothers him to the point that his body is wasting away (v. 5). Members of your group will probably be able to relate how they are experiencing some of the psalmist’s hurts also. The psalmist took comfort from the fact that God was eternal (v. 12) and would have compassion on His people (v. 13) and rebuild Zion (v. 16). Isaiah assured his people, and us, that God’s salvation would last forever, as Jesus promised (Isaiah 51:6, 8; John 11:25).

6. The psalmist first urges us to “take notice” of how God has helped those who wander (107:4–9). When they were hungry, thirsty, and in trouble, He delivered them and led them to a place where they could dwell (vv. 6–7). For those who were in slavery of some kind (v. 10; “some sat in darkness”), they were allowed to suffer until they cried for help, at which time “He delivered them from their distress” (vv. 13–14). For those who were foolish in their rebellion and suffered for it (v. 17), God sent His Word to heal them (v. 20). For those in some kind of peril (vv. 23, 26), He stilled the storm (v. 29). For the needy (v. 41), He has provided abundantly (vv. 35, 37–38, 41). In each case, the psalmist calls on us to respond with the litany of verses 1, 8, 15, 21, and 31. Read these litanies together with your group. The psalmist also calls on us who have been helped by the Lord in similar ways, especially as people redeemed by God through the sacrifice, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, to “say so” (v. 2). Pray that the Spirit blesses you with the words to speak of your redemption in all its facets this week.

November Week 4 Leader Notes

November 23–29; Psalms 114–143

1. From our New Testament perspective, we can see clearly from God's Word what the psalmist could see only dimly—namely, that God, by keeping His promise to the Jews to send a Messiah/Savior to take away the sins of the world, was also providing a Savior for all people on earth. In His conversation with His disciples and the Canaanite woman, Jesus tested the woman's faith by saying that He had first come to the Jews, but commended her for her faith, saying that He had come to her also, even if only to give her a "crumb" from God's grace. Paul says that the Jews have a special blessing in that they were entrusted with God's Word and that they, along with all people, had "righteousness of God" that comes "through faith in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:2, 22). He reminded the Galatians that "God would justify the Gentiles by faith" just as Abraham had righteousness credited to him by faith (Galatians 3:6–9). This truth God had announced to Abraham, and it is reiterated here in Psalm 117. Join Simeon in praising God for your salvation.

2. The psalmist is first concerned that he will not be able to understand and obey God's laws and that he will be ruled by iniquity (sin) (Psalm 119:133). His second concern is that some people shame, criticize, and torment him for trying to live according to God's laws; some seek to get him to disobey God's laws. Although he has dedicated himself to knowing and following God's laws, the psalmist knows that, in the end, he has strayed from them "like a lost sheep" (v. 176). We who trust in the Lord are all in the same situation as the psalmist and can only ask the Lord to seek us and to rescue us from sin, as He has promised and as He did through Jesus (John 1:29; John 3:16; Romans 3:20, 22; Ephesians 2:8).

3. Encourage your group to share the comfort and encouragement they receive from the various verses of Psalm 121. Our help comes from the triune God; the God who made heaven and earth uses His creative power to also sustain us (v. 2). "He will not let your foot be moved" (v. 3) is an assurance that God is with us every step of the way. This phrase had special meaning for those who were climbing rocky roads on their way to the temple, but it also is an assurance for us who need to travel a variety of paths in our daily walk. God will not fall asleep, so we can get some peaceful rest (vv. 3–4). At all times, day or night, God will protect us from all that would bring us harm (v. 5)—throughout our lives (v. 7) and all the way to heaven's gate (v. 8).

4. For a verse to discuss during travel, someone might choose Psalm 126:1–3. Here, the Israelites would recall the joys that their ancestors experienced when they returned to Jerusalem from exile. For us, "the LORD has done great things" when He sent Jesus to suffer, die, and rise from the dead so our sins could be forgiven for His sake. Through His sacrifice, we have been restored to God's family. Another person might choose Psalm 130:7–8 because of the reminders of the hope we have due to the Lord's unfailing love and redemption from all our sins that He has provided. Praise God together for the encouragement He gives in His Word.

5. Encourage members of your group to share their thoughts about their treasured possessions. These possessions might be a home, treasured memories, a gift they have received, or the health they have. Our treasured possessions might also include the people in our lives, such as our spouse, children, grandchildren, and friends. God's "own possession" (Psalm 135:4) is His people. "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does" (v. 6) for their benefit, whether it be providing rain (v. 7) or delivering them from captivity in Egypt (vv. 8–9) and giving them land as an inheritance (v. 12). The Lord continues to love them (v. 14), so the psalmist calls on God's people, the treasured possession, to praise the Lord (vv. 1–3, 19–21). Sing a favorite hymn of praise to God, perhaps the last three verses of "On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry" (*LSB* 344). Then join with fellow Christians this weekend to praise God for His love in sending Jesus to save us and support the ministry of your congregation with your generous offerings.

6. The psalmist acknowledges that God knows him inside and out. God knows when he gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night (Psalm 139:3). God knows all of his thoughts (v. 2). He can't hide anything from God (vv. 7–12). Even before he was born, God knew all about him (v. 15). The psalmist is not bothered by the fact that God knows him so well, because he knows God to be loving and forgiving. He invites God to search again to make sure there is nothing "grievous" in him and to change it if there is (v. 24) by leading him into the "way everlasting." New Testament Christians understand this Way to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Savior of all. Trusting in Jesus for forgiveness, we, too, do not fear God's search.

November Week 5 Leader Notes

November 30; Psalms 144–150

1. Here is a short list of the attributes for which the psalmist praises God:

God is a stronghold and deliverer. (Psalm 144:2)

God rescues His people. (144:7, 11)

The Lord is gracious and merciful and good to all. (145:8–9)

God provides for all people. (145:15–16)

The Lord is faithful and helps those in need. (146:6–9)

The Lord heals and sustains people. (147:3, 6)

The Lord creates with His power. (148:5)

The Lord provides salvation. (149:4)

The Lord acts with power and might. (150:2)

Encourage the members of your group to choose which attributes of God are particularly meaningful and encouraging to them and to explain their choices. Let the power and love of our God, shown especially through Jesus Christ and brought to each one personally by the Holy Spirit, strengthen you and keep you in faith to life everlasting. Praise the Lord!

December Week 1 Leader Notes

December 1–6; Proverbs 1–7

1. We “fear the Lord” when we lovingly trust God’s promises and exercise our faith by living according to His commands and submitting our will to His will. By the power of the Spirit, that wisdom will grow into a sanctified life. When we reflect the love and forgiveness of the Gospel in our lives, we praise God and proclaim to others that God is the one who is guiding our lives. The passage is a reminder that all education must have Christ as its foundation and that for the Church, Christian education is a primary activity.

2. We have all seen signs similar to this: No Christ; no wisdom. Know Christ; know wisdom. That is the message of Paul in Colossians. Ten centuries prior to the fulfillment of God’s promises in the life and death of Jesus, Solomon wrote of such godly wisdom. Some of the blessings of godly wisdom that Solomon mentions in Proverbs are the following: a person with godly wisdom will “understand righteousness and justice and equity” (Proverbs 2:9); a person with this wisdom will be saved from following wicked ways (2:12, 16) and will walk instead in “the way of the good” (2:20). This is the protection godly wisdom provides. Those with godly wisdom will “trust in the LORD” rather than trust in their own understanding (3:5); they will honor the Lord with their wealth (3:9) and help those who need it (3:27). In this Advent season, you might use the second verse of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (*LSB* 357) as your prayer for wisdom.

3. The “sound learning” that David had taught Solomon was not to think like or follow people who were set on doing evil. David could remember back to his being chosen by God to be king. God wanted someone to be king who trusted Him. David could also remember his relationship with Jonathan that brought him many blessings. He could also recall times when he had been placed in danger by marrying one of Saul’s daughters (1 Samuel 18:17–19). In battle, he was better off when he “inquired of the LORD” (1 Samuel 23:1–5) and when he did not listen to the rash suggestions of his men (1 Samuel 24:3–7). He could remember when he succumbed to temptation, committed adultery with Bathsheba, and tried to use murder to cover up this sin (2 Samuel 11:1–5, 14). He also could remember the tragedy of Absalom and all who had been hurt because of his desire to avenge his sister’s rape (2 Samuel 13:22). We, too, are tempted to think like and follow those bent on evil. Your group members will be able to give examples of this. Peter, who also gave in to temptation, by God’s grace assures us that Jesus suffered for our sins so that we could “live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

4. Some of the ravages of adultery that Solomon describes include an unhappy life in which the adulterer believes someone else is benefiting from his efforts; the adulterer regrets that he did not follow good advice; and the adulterer gets “burned.” God says that our marriage relationships should be like the relationship between God and His Church. Husbands love their wives just as Christ loved the Church, His Bride, and gave Himself for her on the cross to cleanse her (Ephesians 5:25). The Church, by the Spirit’s power, responds by submitting to Christ in all things (Ephesians 5:24). “The Church’s one foundation Is Jesus Christ, her Lord; She is His new creation By water and the Word. From heav’n He came and sought her To be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her, And for her life He died” (*LSB* 644:1).

5. After reading Proverbs 7, encourage the members of your group, if they feel comfortable doing so, to share stories of how Satan has tempted them or people they know to sin (Proverbs 7:21). Find examples of his alluring temptations in our current culture. Then remind one another of the rescue and forgiveness that God has provided in Jesus, our Savior. God, through Isaiah, promises that our sins will be “as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18), and through Hosea, He promises to redeem us from death and heal our waywardness (Hosea 13:14; 14:4). Paul reminds us that God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ’s death and has made us “holy and blameless and above reproach before Him” (Colossians 1:22). Rejoice together at your salvation. “O bride of Christ, rejoice . . . Now comes the King most glorious To reign o’er all victorious” (*LSB* 335:1, 2).

December Week 2 Leader Notes

December 7–13; Proverbs 8–19

1. The Proverbs description of wisdom and John's description of Jesus are similar in that Proverbs speaks of wisdom as existing before creation (Proverbs 8:23, 27) and John speaks of Jesus, the Word, as existing "in the beginning" (John 1:1). In fact, both were active in creation (Proverbs 8:30 and John 1:2). Wisdom, the craftsman, and the Word are spoken of as being at the Father's side (Proverbs 8:30 and John 1:18). When Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as the "wisdom of God" and the "wisdom from God," he is saying that God's wise solution to the problem of sin is that Jesus Christ, who is both divine and human, had to die on the cross to bring to those who believe in Him "righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). To those who are perishing, this whole idea is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18), but, to those who believe, Christ is the "wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). That is why we pray, "In loving forgiveness, O Jesus, enfold me" (*LSB* 536:5).

2. Both Wisdom and Folly prepare a meal for guests at their respective homes, both of which seem to be located at the most important and accessible place in the city. Both invite others to come to eat what they have to offer. The contrasts between the two, however, are stark and startling. While Wisdom has been active in the building of the house and the preparing of the meal—as God is active in the creation of the world and in preparing salvation for His people by sending His Son to suffer and die for the sins of all people—Folly sits (Proverbs 9:14); nothing is mentioned of her involvement in building or preparing. While Wisdom has taken care to prepare a nourishing meal that offers life (9:5–6), Folly offers stolen food that is to be eaten secretly and results in death (9:17–18). The picture of the meal that Wisdom offers mirrors the blessings that God offers to us through His Son in the life-giving waters of Baptism and the forgiveness and strength for a new life offered in the Lord's Supper. Perhaps that is why Solomon reiterates the theme of Proverbs in the middle of this chapter: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (9:10). You may want to close your discussion by praying verses 4 and 5 of the hymn "Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared" (*LSB* 622) as we leave to God "how this can be" and thank God that "[His] Word alone suffices me."

3. Encourage your group members to discuss some of the proverbs that seem to describe life as it is. People generally seem to have positive memories of those who live uprightly and those who treat others wickedly are remembered negatively (Proverbs 10:7; 11:10). Likewise, those who are trying to do the right thing are able to make constructive comments, while those who have evil intent manage to say things that hurt people and worsen situations (10:32; 11:12). That's just the way it is. When proverbs speak about God, they point out how much God detests evil and those who do evil (10:29; 11:1, 20) and that He delights in and protects the righteous and what they do (10:29; 11:20). Paul would thoughtfully comment that no one is righteous because all people sin (Romans 3:10–12). He would point out that our righteousness comes from God through the redemption that came through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:21–24). He would turn Proverbs 11:21 around and say that, in Christ, we have been set free from sin and have been made slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:18). Christ has set us free from sin so we can have real

freedom from the Law and our sinful nature, free to display the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:1, 13, 22).

4. These passages in Proverbs all state facts. The Lord does delight in those who are truthful. The Lord delights in those who use “just weight” (Proverbs 11:1); in other words, He delights in those who are honest and who live blameless lives (Proverbs 11:20). Proverbs 8:31 speaks of Christ at the conclusion of creation as delighting in mankind, a pronouncement similar to God’s conclusion when He viewed His creation that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). The problem is that after the fall into sin, people are no longer able to do those things that bring God delight without His sanctifying power that comes to us through the Gospel. Recall Luther’s explanation to the Third Article. One function of these passages in Proverbs is described by Matthias Loy who, in writing about the Law of God, says that “To those who help in Christ have found And would in works of love abound It shows what deeds are His delight And should be done as good and right” (*LSB* 579:3). When we fall, Loy also writes concerning the Gospel, “It brings the Savior’s righteousness To robe our souls in royal dress; From all our guilt it brings release And gives the troubled conscience peace” (*LSB* 580:3).

5. People are made righteous by the blood of Jesus, as Paul says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Those who believe that Jesus is their Savior Paul urges to live lives marked by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:1, 13, 22–23) and to imitate God in their love, “as Christ loved us” (Ephesians 5:2). You may want to use verse 2 of the hymn “Son of God, Eternal Savior” (*LSB* 842) as your closing prayer.

6. Discuss the “sad but true” statements of Proverbs 16–19 listed in the question as well as any others that members of your group may choose. Unfortunately, perverse people create dissension and gossips destroy relationships between people; some may perceive foolish people to be wise if they remain silent, and often, foolish people find delight in airing their own opinions rather than in trying to understand situations; too often the poor are ignored and no one wants to help them. Sadly, all of us fall into these sins with our gossiping, stubbornness, and neglect of those who need help. Our only hope is to plead for forgiveness from God and depend on Him for safety. In Christ, the coming Savior of Advent, we have salvation, as the hymnwriter announces.

December Week 3 Leader Notes

December 14–20; Proverbs 20–31

1. Children, and we adults, are judged by our actions, and our actions indicate that we are sinful people. Proverbs 20:9 and 27 indicate that no one can say, “I have kept my heart pure; I am clean from my sin.” God’s searchlight indicates our sinful condition. In His love, God sent His Son to suffer the “blows that wound” to cleanse away our evil and “make clean the innermost parts” (Proverbs 20:30). Encourage your group members to discuss other proverbs in this section that depict our sinful condition and then assure your group of God’s victory over sin in the words of Proverbs 21:31. You might want to use the words of “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” (*LSB* 341:1) as your song of victory.
2. Provide opportunity for your group to discuss the reasons for participating in and conducting Christian education efforts. Solomon points to the goal of all Christian education efforts when he says that he teaches so “that your trust may be in the LORD” (Proverbs 22:19). This statement is not to discount the work of the Holy Spirit. The results of all Christian education efforts are in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Churches and individuals participate in Christian education efforts in response to the Lord’s call to “go into all the world” to teach and preach the Gospel so “that your trust may be in the LORD.” Other passages in Proverbs instruct us to train children in the Lord’s way so they will be faithful to Him later in life (22:6), to apply our hearts to the Lord’s instruction and be zealous “in the fear of the LORD” (23:17), and to get “wisdom, instruction, and understanding” (23:23). Other passages remind us that “in the fear of the LORD” a person avoids evil, that those who fear the Lord have a secure fortress and a fountain of life (14:26–27), especially when it comes to salvation through Jesus, our Savior, and that all knowledge begins with knowing and fearing the Holy One (9:10). Close by praying for agencies of Christian education and develop a plan to help them in an active way.
3. This section of Proverbs says that both what is said and how it is said are important. A trustworthy messenger “refreshes the soul,” whether delivering a rebuke (Proverbs 25:13) or a persuasive speech (Proverbs 25:15). The Lord wants us to be diligent about teaching His Law (Jonah 1:1; Deuteronomy 6:4–9) and the Gospel (Matthew 28:19–20, 1 Timothy 4:9–13; 2 Timothy 1:8–10) and about praying, especially about praying for the skill to proclaim the Gospel clearly (Colossians 4:2–6).
4. Solomon lists these types of people and identifies what makes them such unworthy models: fools (who are not trustworthy and wound at random), braggarts, the lazy person (who does nothing to solve problems), the meddler (who asks for trouble), the jokester (who shoots deadly arrows and makes light of it), the gossip (who kindles strife), the malicious person (who is deceitful and wicked), and the liar (who hurts and works ruin). His purpose is to warn the reader about being like these people. “You were dead in the trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1), Paul says, but “because of the great love with which He loved us,” God “made us alive together with Christ” and “raised us up with Him” (Ephesians 2:4–6). Paul reminds us that “the love of Christ controls us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). We are compelled to share the Gospel. Christ’s love also compels us to live for the One who died for all and rose for us (2 Corinthians 5:15). Those who are in Christ are a

new creation who “become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21), displaying aspects of the life that Solomon describes. “All this is from God” (2 Corinthians 5:18), who reconciled “the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

5. Solomon mentions the following characteristics of a righteous person: a person who seeks the Lord understands justice (Proverbs 28:5), confesses his or her sins (28:13), gives to the poor (28:27), loves wisdom (29:3), understands justice for the poor (29:7), and abhors the unjust (29:27). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul says that those who live lives worthy of the Lord please God in every way by doing good works that bear fruit, growing in their knowledge of the Lord, and joyfully giving thanks to the Lord for their salvation (Colossians 1:10–14).

6. Agur expressed the thoughts of many who read through Proverbs when he says, in effect, “I have not learned wisdom” and “I certainly don’t understand God” (Proverbs 30:3). Most of all, he is acknowledging that he has not and cannot live up to the high standards that God holds out for His people. Perhaps this is why Agur’s proverbs are included here; they help us understand that there are many things that we humans do not understand, that “every word of God proves true,” that we are all sinners and in need of God’s forgiveness, and that God is our place of safety (30:5). The sayings of Lemuel were placed at the end of Proverbs perhaps to encourage the reader one last time to speak up for what is right according to God’s Word (31:8–9) to benefit the needy. His epilogue then describes the epitome of wisdom that is God’s Word as personified by “a woman who fears the LORD” (31:30); it is an echo of the opening verses of the book: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7).

December Week 4 Leader Notes

December 21–27; Ecclesiastes 1–12

1. The Preacher tried searching what had been done in the past, he tried developing wisdom, he tried various pleasures, he tried great projects, he tried hard work, only to find them meaningless because doing them was like “striving after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14, 17; 2:11). Nothing was new, most of it brought grief, these activities didn’t gain anything, and “the wise dies just like the fool” (2:16). Encourage your group to discuss whether the things that the Preacher found meaningless were also without value. To most people, studying the past has value, as does a good laugh (2:2) and engaging in great projects (2:4). The Preacher acknowledges as much in his comment in Ecclesiastes 2:24–25, but these activities must be seen as gifts from God. John warns against loving the “desires of the flesh” and boasting about our own accomplishments (1 John 2:15–17). John speaks of our real treasure, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Thank God for His gift to us in His Son and ask Him to strengthen your trust in His most precious treasure, perhaps in the words of the Christmas hymn “Now Sing We, Now Rejoice” (*LSB* 386:1).

2. One approach to solving the problem of meaninglessness the Preacher notes is that there is “a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8); don’t get upset about everything that is happening. Think of the pleasures of your everyday life as gifts from God (3:12–14). Let everything rest in the hands of the Lord, who will work out just solutions to the injustices you see (3:17). Some of these difficulties are God’s way of testing you (3:18). Sharing life with a spouse and friends is a way to share the burdens and be strengthened for the Christian life (4:9–12). The angel announced the birth of the Savior from sin. Peter confessed that Jesus, the Holy One of God, had the words of eternal life. Praise God for His gifts to us, perhaps using the words of verse 3 of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” (*LSB* 380).

3. Nothing that the shepherds may have said at the manger is recorded in Scripture. Perhaps they simply observed the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Savior. But we know that once they had seen the Savior, they “made known the saying” and glorified and praised God (Luke 2:17, 20). The Preacher instructed his hearers to “draw near to listen” (Ecclesiastes 5:1) to counteract the human tendency to want to be in charge and to be god in every situation. “God is in charge, not you” is his message (5:2). Knowing and trusting that the Lord who keeps His promise to save all people from their sin has all the situations of the world in His care will help us celebrate Christmas with peace and joy. Of course, we need not remain silent about this good news. Knowing that our salvation is here, we break out in praise and proclamation. You might want to use the words and song of “Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light” (*LSB* 378) to help your group reflect on God’s great gift to us.

4. Paul explained to the Corinthians that when believers in Christ die they have “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” in which to live, as compared to the tent that we live in when we are alive (2 Corinthians 5:1). As long as we live, we will have something to groan about and we will always be hoping for the time when our burdens will be lifted. “While we are at home in the body we are away

from the Lord” (5:6). In one sense, Paul prefers the time when he will be at home with the Lord, so better is “the day of death than the day of birth” (Ecclesiastes 7:1). He says much the same thing to the Philippians, although he qualifies it by saying that for the sake of their “progress and joy in the faith” he would remain with them (Philippians 1:25). Since he cannot really understand why things happen the way they do in the world, Solomon feels that death is better than a birthday; at least his burden of not understanding would be relieved. Paul, while longing to be with God in heaven, wants to have the opportunity to teach and nurture people in the Christian faith. Praise God for Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection, which makes our progress and joy in the faith possible. You might like to use the hymn “Let Us All with Gladsome Voice” (*LSB* 390) to sing His praises.

5. The destiny that overtakes us all, whether we have done good or evil, whether we have been wise or foolish, whether we have contributed to society or not, is that we will all die. In light of this, Solomon advises people to thankfully eat, drink, and celebrate (for this is how “God has already approved what you do”), and to enjoy life with your wife and family (Ecclesiastes 9:7, 9–10). He also says to be calm and earn a good living (Ecclesiastes 10:4, 19). Solomon, under the Spirit’s inspiration, teaches like Paul does that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). God’s joyous solution to this problem is Jesus Christ, the sacrifice of atonement for our sins (Romans 3:22–25). In your prayers, praise God for the gift of His Son, His atonement for our sin.

6. Solomon, the Preacher, urges his readers to “fear God and keep His commandments,” the same message with which he began the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 1:7). In his first plea, stated as “Remember also your Creator,” he urges people to fear God when they are young, before you can’t see well, before you lose your teeth, before you can’t hear the birds sing, before you’re afraid of heights, and before you don’t want to do anything (Ecclesiastes 12:1–5). In his second plea, Solomon calls on his readers to fear God before they die, before they return to dust (Genesis 3:19). He speaks of the proverbs as “goads.” A goad is a spear or a pointed stick that is used to get a stubborn animal moving. Provide opportunity for the members of your group to pick out a few proverbs that were especially pointed for them and to explain what action they were goaded to take. Conclude by discussing the comfort given by Jesus, our good Shepherd, who gave Himself on the cross to provide forgiveness and healing for all the hurts of the goads.

December Week 5 Leader Notes

December 28–31; Song of Solomon 1–8

1. The adjuration urges all people to wait patiently to engage in sexual relations until they are married, as the Sixth Commandment states. Through its reference to gazelles and does, the adjuration calls us to live in accord with the way God designed sexual relations to occur at creation. God most clearly showed His love for us in His redemptive activity, giving His own Son to live perfectly for us and to take the punishment for our sins on Himself by suffering and dying on the cross. Your group will probably identify several contemporary situations that the adjuration addresses, including sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, and the portrayals of sexuality in the media. The adjuration is a call to be chaste, pure, and faithful. It is also an assurance of God's forgiveness when we fall short. Consult the Concordia Commentary: *The Song of Songs* by Christopher W. Mitchell for more reading on this message in the Song of Solomon. We are indebted to this resource for help in applying the Song of Solomon to our lives in this study.

2. In his wife, the Shulammitte, Solomon saw perfection and beauty (Song of Solomon 4:7; 6:4, 9). His comparisons of her beauty to various beauties in nature (doves, pomegranates, fawns, lilies, gold, spices, sapphires, and cedar, to name a few) echo the perfect beauty of God's creation on the sixth day: "It was very good" (Genesis 1:31). She also describes him in equally glowing terms and concludes, "He is altogether desirable" (Song of Solomon 5:16). These are descriptions that indicate deep love for each other—a love that God intends to have grow and mature throughout life. Such growth and maturing is hinted at later in Song of Solomon 8:6. This love between Solomon and the Shulammitte is a fitting, though imperfect, picture of Christ's love for the Church. Christ loved the Church and sacrificed Himself for her so that she could be holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25–27). That is how Christ loves each of us, whether married or single. That is the joyous relationship with Christ to which Paul calls each of us when he urges "husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church" (Ephesians 5:25) and "wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). Such a love is a profound mystery (Ephesians 5:32) and a gift of God's grace and mercy.

3. Christian marriages picture the relationship between Christ and the Church when spouses faithfully love each other and forgive each other, as Christ did through His life of faithfulness and sacrifice for all people. In their marriage, Christian spouses have the opportunity to help each other grow in faith through study of the Word and modeling of the Christian faith. As Christopher Mitchell writes, "A marriage animated by the mutual love between Christ and the church will dramatize that love in a tangible way and testify to the far greater love of God in Jesus Christ" (Mitchell, 94).

4. The Shulammitte asked Solomon to wear a marking stamp on a cord that would hang close to his heart and a seal worn on the arm, like a signet ring. Both were used in Old Testament times to mark property that belonged to the person; she is claiming Him and showing that she is willing to be His own in return and joyfully submit to Him in the wedding covenant. She would bear His name. Being His, she would receive His love and protection, as a king cares for and protects his kingdom. In our marriage customs today, we ask each other to wear rings that we exchange. Women have taken the family name of

the man they marry. In our Christian life today, Christ places His seal on us in our Baptism (Acts 2:38–39), when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and our Christian name, and when we hear and believe His Word (Ephesians 1:13–14). To close, you may want to pray the prayer of verse 3 of the hymn “In His Temple Now Behold Him” (*LSB* 519), in which we ask God to “seal us with Your promise sure.”

In Song of Solomon 8:14, Solomon’s love, the Shulammitte, invites him to “make haste” and come away. We might say she’s inviting him to go on a cruise or a weekend getaway with her and show his virility and strength. She is anticipating his coming with joy in a manner similar to the way she anticipated his coming before they were married (Song of Solomon 2:4). The two New Testament passages are Christian expressions of that same longing and anticipation of the Lord’s second coming. Encourage your group members to express how they feel about and anticipate Christ’s second coming. Then praise our heavenly Bridegroom for His coming to us at Christmas, in Word and Sacrament, and at His second coming using the words of the hymn “The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us” (*LSB* 514)