

THE 
PRESENT
WORD 
ADULT BIBLE LESSONS

LEADER'S GUIDE

WINTER 2020-2021

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Introduction

As disciples, a key element of our discipleship is to discern what God is calling us to be and do. When we make a commitment to follow Jesus Christ, it is not enough to simply respond with words. We embark on a lifelong journey in which we are continually seeking God's will for our lives. As we grow and change, we may discover new ways to be faithful, more complex challenges to which we must respond, and new partners for ministry. Together with other brothers and sisters in Christ, we experience the Spirit moving in and through us as we seek to hear God's voice and respond.

In this study, participants have the opportunity to experience God's call by exploring New Testament texts together. First, we encounter the witness of Jesus' heritage and those persons who were faithful to God's call before and at Jesus' birth. Then we explore Jesus' call to ministry and his response through the accounts of the Gospel writers. Finally, we are introduced to faithful women who persevered as disciples despite the context in which they lived and worked.

As you examine the testimony of the New Testament about God's call as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ, may your own sense of call become more clear, and may you commit yourself anew to live faithfully as Christ's disciple.

The Uniform Series

The Present Word quarterly Bible study is based on the Uniform Series, a plan for reading and studying the Bible. The objectives of the series are to help persons increasingly:

1. to know the content of the Bible,
2. to understand the message of the Bible in light of their experiences and relationships, and
3. to be aware of God's self-disclosure, especially God's redeeming love as revealed in Jesus Christ, that they may respond in faith and love—to the end that they may know who they are and what their human situation means, grow as the children of God rooted in the Christian community, live in the Spirit of God in every relationship, fulfill their common discipleship in the world, and abide in the Christian hope.

The emphasis in these objectives is on the Bible as the record of the revelation of God in Christ as the primary source of understanding the meaning of the Christian faith and as the most effective means of confronting persons with the significant concerns of the gospel. These concerns include personal faith, values, human relationships, social responsibility, Christian hope, and the implications of Christian discipleship under the lordship of Christ and in the fellowship of his Spirit.

One of the distinctive features of the Uniform Series is the collaborative process through which denominational partners engage in the common task of developing the Lesson Guides. The development process begins with a Scope and Sequence subcommittee whose work sets a framework for the biblical themes of each six-year cycle. The Scope and Sequence team for Cycle 23 (2016–2022) chose themes that are creatively expressed in this statement of Christian faith:

The God of the Bible, the source of creation, loves us and calls us in covenant through our faith to worship and to do justice.

The underlined words in the statement compose the eight recurring themes throughout each quarterly segment of *The Present Word*.

Quarter in Brief

This quarter examines God's call in stories from the New Testament. The greatest call came to Jesus. Other calls in the New Testament led to the extension of Christian ministry into the known world.

Unit I, "The Beginning of a Call," includes four sessions from the Gospel of Matthew. Session 1 highlights the heritage of Jesus. Session 2 tells the story of Jesus' birth. Session 3 speaks of the witness of the Magi to Jesus' call as the Messiah. Session 4 tells of the call of John the Baptist.

Unit II, "Jesus and Calls in His Ministry," presents four sessions about Jesus' ministry. Luke emphasizes Jesus' call to proclamation and ministry and identifies Jesus as one who calls followers. Mark speaks to Jesus' call to a ministry of healing. John gives us a look at Jesus' call as the intercessor for those who follow him.

Unit III, "The Call of Women," is a five-week study highlighting women in ministry. The first session focuses on prophesying women mentioned in the New Testament. The second session centers the Samaritan woman's evangelistic ministry. Session 3 explores Mary Magdalene's call to unwavering discipleship. Session 4 gives an opportunity to study the impact of Priscilla's ministry. The final session focuses on Lydia's call to service and hospitality.

Resources for the Leader

The following resources are suggested for those who are interested in doing additional research and study.

Bible Commentary Series

Interpretation Bible Studies series. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998–2008.

New Daily Study Bible, by William Barclay. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

The New Testament for Everyone series, by N. T. Wright. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004–2015.

Bible Dictionaries

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

HarperCollins Bible Dictionary: Revised and Updated, edited by Mark Allan Powell. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011.

Books on God's Call

Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today, by Mark Labberton. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014.

Calling and Clarity: Discovering What God Wants for Your Life, by Doug Koskela. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.

Let Your Life Speak, by Parker Palmer. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Listening Hearts: Discerning God's Call in Community, by Susan G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean and Susan M. Ward. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2011.

The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective, by R. Paul Stevens. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good, by Steven Garber. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014.

Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life, by Douglas J. Schuurman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Book on Christian Practices

Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People, edited by Dorothy C. Bass. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.

Movies that Encourage Reflection and Discussion about Call

The Blues Brothers

Brother Sun, Sister Moon

Chariots of Fire

Dead Man Walking

It's a Wonderful Life

The Mission

The Shoes of a Fisherman

Video Viewing

When you show videos to a group, you need to obtain a public performance license from Christian Video Licensing International (CVLI) at <https://us.cvli.com>. Check with your church, though, to see if an umbrella license has already been obtained. Many denominations—through conferences, jurisdictions, dioceses, and other structures—secure licenses for their churches.

Worship Leaflets

Geneva Press offers *The Present Word* quarterly Worship Leaflets. Each leaflet includes a brief service of worship with prayers, hymn texts, and opportunities for reflection on the Scripture passage of the day. Order at pcusastore.com.

CALLED THROUGH HERITAGE

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Nov. 30	God's Anointed Ruler of All Nations	Psalm 2
T	Dec. 1	Blessed and Chosen in Christ	Ephesians 1:1-14
W	Dec. 2	Christ, Head over All People/Things	Ephesians 1:15-23
Th	Dec. 3	In the Family Line of David	Matthew 1:6b-15
F	Dec. 4	God Anoints Jesus King	Hebrews 1:6-9
Sa	Dec. 5	Jesus, Creator and Eternal Ruler	Hebrews 1:10-14

MAIN IDEA

Hebrews affirms the ultimate origins of Jesus in the very life of God, and Matthew explains how Jesus was the product of his long biblical heritage.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:1-17; Hebrews 1

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. (Heb. 1:2)

PREPARING TO LEAD

- Pray for participants and for yourself.
- Familiarize yourself with the context of the Scripture.
- This is the second week of Advent. Set up four blue or purple candles, or three purple candles and one pink, depending on your congregation's practice. Have matches available.
- For the optional Scripture activity, prepare a set of cue cards: Applause, Cheers, Boos, Huh?, Hisses. Recruit a strong reader to read the script.
- Choose an additional option to explore the Scripture from Step 6. This unit's hymns are all familiar carols. If you plan to sing the one suggested, decide if you need an accompanist or someone to lead the singing.

LEADING THE LESSON

Opening Worship

1. Gathering

- Greet participants and provide nametags.
- Form pairs and have participants discuss one thing they know about their family background and how it has influenced the person they have become. In the full group, have partners introduce each other and name one fact from their discussion.
- Distribute Bibles, Participant's Books, and Worship Leaflets for lesson 1.
- Formulate and get consensus on some simple ground rules for the study (for example, welcoming diverse points of view, maintaining confidentiality, and so on).

2. Morning Prayer 1

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Light two Advent candles.
- Encourage participants to settle into silence.
- Invite volunteers to lead portions of Morning Prayer from the Worship Leaflet, beginning with the Opening Sentences and ending after the Morning Hymn.

Teaching Tip

The optional Scripture reading activity, a scripted genealogy, uses humor to review some characters with whom the group is familiar, while acknowledging that there are a number of persons in Jesus' family tree who are likely unfamiliar to even the most scholarly among the group. At the same time, the genealogy serves as a reminder that even Jesus, fully human and fully divine, has in his family tree some characters with decidedly human flaws.

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 1:1–5, Matthew 1:1–6, 16–17

1:1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son;
today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

“I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son”?

Matthew 1:1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah . . .

¹⁶And Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

Bible Study

3. Scripture Reading

Participant’s Book, p. 2

- Invite participants to read Matthew 1: 1–6, 17 silently. Then ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 1:1–5. Discuss:
 1. Which passage speaks more clearly to you? Why?
- Option: Have the reader you recruited read the following aloud as you hold up cue cards:

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah [CHEERS, APPLAUSE], the [CHEERS], the son of Abraham [APPLAUSE]

who pretended Sarah was his sister, let Pharaoh have her, and received many cattle [BOOS].

Abraham was the father of Isaac, whose name means laughter [CHEERS]; and Isaac was the father of Jacob, who stole his brother's birthright [BOOS]; and Jacob was the father of Joseph and his brothers, who sold Joseph into slavery [BOOS]; and Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah [HUH?] by Tamar, who played the prostitute [BOOS] for the sake of justice [CHEERS]. Perez was the father of Hezron [HUH?]; and Hezron was the father of Aram [HUH?] and Aram was the father of Aminadab [HUH?], and Aminadab was the father of Nahshon, a fine captain of Israel [CHEERS]. Nahshon was the father of Salmon [HUH?], and Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, the prostitute [BOOS] who saved God's people [CHEERS]. Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth [CHEERS], the faithful foreigner. Obed was the father of Jesse, the father of King David [CHEERS]. And David was the father of Solomon [APPLAUSE] by the wife of Uriah, whom David had set up to be killed [BOOS].

And Jacob was the father of Joseph [CHEERS], the husband of Mary [APPLAUSE], of whom Jesus was born who is called the Messiah [CHEERS, APPLAUSE] ¹

4. Jesus' Heritage Participant's Book, p. 3

- Invite participants to compare the two passages from Matthew and Hebrews. On newsprint, jot down their comments. Discuss:
 1. Which passage points us to Jesus as Son of God? How?
 2. Which passage roots Jesus in his Jewish heritage? How is Jesus affirmed as Messiah?
- Ask participants to name persons in the Matthew reading whose stories are familiar and to describe each one. Ask them to name persons who are not familiar (if you used the optional Scripture reading activity, these would have been those for whom the response was "huh?").

5. Son of God and Human One Participant's Book, p. 4

- Invite participants to respond to the idea that part of Jesus' call involves intimate relationship with creation, and that Jesus stands in the prophetic tradition. Discuss:
 1. What implications for Jesus' followers today do you see in these aspects of his call?
 2. To what does the language of "purification for sins" refer? What new nuances of meaning, if any, surface for you?

1. Douglas Adams, *The Prostitute in the Family Tree: Discovering Humor and Irony in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 4-5.

- Bible genealogies show that history is not a random collection of events. Ask:
 3. What is the significance of Matthew's inclusion of the women's names?
 4. How do you imagine Matthew's first readers responded to finding those names in the genealogy?
- Christians have often had a hard time affirming equally Jesus' humanity and divinity.
 1. Which of these aspects of Jesus' identity are hardest and easiest for you to grab hold of: creator, sustainer, and redeemer, one who speaks for God, Jewish man? Why?

6. Stepping into the World

Participant's Book, p. 5

- Discuss some of the following:
 1. How has your sense of call been shaped by your human heritage? Your faith heritage?
 2. In what ways are we tempted to express our identity in consumerism, rather than in Jesus?
 3. When and where do you hear Jesus' voice most easily? Who helps you discern what Jesus is saying and gives you support as you seek to obey?
- Choose from among these optional ideas to explore the Scripture:
 1. Have participants each sketch out their family tree. What important events and stories are connected to their identity through their family tree? What does this indicate about their earthly heritage?
 2. Invite participants to share about persons and experiences that are part of their spiritual heritage.
 3. Review early creeds of the church that affirm that Jesus is fully man and fully God. Discuss how today's texts led the church to this affirmation.

Closing Worship

7. Morning Prayer 2

Worship Leaflet, lesson 1

- Invite the participants to turn to the Worship Leaflet; enlist volunteers to lead remaining portions of Morning Prayer.
- Begin with Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, say the Lord's Prayer, and end with the Dismissal.
- Bless participants as they leave. This can be as simple as saying "(Name), trust that the Word of God endures forever."
- Extinguish the Advent candles.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture that may be helpful for your study.

1. Biblical Christology pictures Jesus as not only in the image of God, as was the first Adam (Gen. 1:26–27), but also as being the exact likeness, the complete image of God (Col. 1:15, 19; Heb. 1:3). As stated in early creeds, Jesus was both fully human and fully God.
2. The idea of inheritance (Heb. 1:4) is a key concept in Hebrews. Since Jesus is the Son of God, he passes an eternal inheritance to those called to follow him (9:15).
3. The term *father* is often used in Scripture to denote an ancestor, not necessarily a direct, biological predecessor or parent (1 Kgs. 15:11; 2 Kgs. 18:3; 22:2).

ENGAGE YOUR LEARNERS DURING THE WEEK

Send an email or a text:

1. Encouraging them to reflect on what it means to ground our identity in Jesus Christ in this season of Advent, not in the consumerism and consumption of the shopping season.
2. Suggesting that they use the Daily Bible Readings as a way of sharpening their perception of Jesus as one who fulfilled Scripture.