



NURTURING YOUR FAITH:

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# *Called*

This Bible study in the *Nurturing Your Faith* series focuses on our calling as Christians by God into the body of Christ. To do this we will look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We will consider God calling us to faith from unbelief through His Word, through Baptism, through Holy Communion, and through the witness of other Christians who, upon hearing their call to share the faith, were instrumental in our receiving of God's gracious gift of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Then it is our turn: as Christians, we, too, have the responsibility—the privilege—to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

 Watch video introduction with Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler, Speaker of The Lutheran Hour, at [lhm.org/studies](http://lhm.org/studies).

## CALLED FROM THE WORLD

The letter to the Ephesians, one of four “captivity letters,” is typically grouped with Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon and attributed to Paul's ministry output while imprisoned in Rome in the late 50s/early 60s of the first century. In this six-chapter epistle to Gentile believers, he articulates God's work in extending His call beyond the Jews. “In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will” (1:4b-5a). This is an adoption that Paul says is made available to those who were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12b).

For all those Gentiles (non-Jews) throughout the world, this is some very good news: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (2:13b-14). This is the call to faith God has extended to each and every one of us. From Abraham (see Genesis 11:27-12:9) and Moses (see Exodus 3-4) to David (see 1 Samuel 16) and the prophets, God has been calling us—to turn to Him, to repent and lay down our lives, to trust in the knowledge that, as Paul so eloquently says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (1:7).

Called—do you feel called by God? Can you “put a finger on” when it was that God called you? How did your life begin to change once you understood you were called by God?

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Do you think it's possible to be called by God—and miss it? How might that happen—how might we miss a calling from God? If you missed a calling, do you think God re-issues another?

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Do you think God makes dramatic calls to people today like those recorded in the Old and New Testaments? Can you give an example of such?

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## GOD-GIVEN NEWNESS

There is a unity and oneness that accompanies the call of God on our lives. That is, God's Spirit works through His Word, our Baptism, and Holy Communion to bring us to faith. Empowered by God at work in our lives, we are not to be conformed to this world but instead, transformed, renewed—new creations, messengers of reconciliation, ambassadors for Christ (see Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21). And with this calling—this summons from God to a new life—we are changed, but first we must die to ourselves and any hope of making ourselves righteous before Him. Paul writes, "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:19-20).

Paul's letters attest that he was *all-in* when it came to his new life in Christ—no matter what the worldly consequences. The impact of his call was such that for the sake of the Gospel, he could press on and endure in a manner like Jesus, even to the point of physical pain (see Galatians 6:17). "I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (4:1-6).

Do the Christians you know seem to take their callings seriously? How does the life of a Christian who takes his or her calling seriously differ from those Christians who are nonchalant about their calling?

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How far down into our lives should our callings go? Do they leave any room for us and our personal likes and dislikes? Does a calling from God prevent the individual from being “true to themselves” in their own personal interests? Can we prepare ourselves beforehand (study, practice, learning a skill) that God may then include in our calling?

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How can we act on our calling to ensure we are following God’s will for our lives? While God’s calling is a singular event of sorts, it’s also something we act on throughout our lives. How do we participate in our calling to ensure we are daily seeking to follow God as He leads?

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## ENTERING HIS SERVICE

Our calling to faith necessitates a new perception from us. Though welcomed by God into His family and blessed with eternal salvation, *it’s not all about us*. God works through people in our lives (Luther’s “masks of God” or the concept of God working through people’s vocations) to further His kingdom on earth. As Christians, we are to be conscientious of the life we live as Jesus-followers; the call we received demands our best and to give it unstintingly.

At times our calling will require sacrifice, helping a colleague or friend or *stranger* who may need our assistance. In these individuals, too, God can be masked, as Dr. Gene Veith reminds us: “If we are masks of God, even when we do not realize it, it is also true that God is masked in our neighbor. Particularly when our neighbor is in need—when he or she is sick, hungry, thirsty, naked, a prisoner, a stranger—Christ Himself is hidden. ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren,’ the Lord says, ‘ye have done it unto Me’ (Matthew 25:40).”

Paul wants no less than for every believer to share this mindset of Christ. “That according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:16-19).

Called by God—that seems like a huge thing—what can you do in your life to serve others (in the meantime) when your particular call may be unknown or unclear to you?

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How might Paul have felt thwarted at times from fulfilling his mission as an apostle? How might he have “gotten around” difficult circumstances to continue his work? What were the tools and resources Paul used to stay close to God, to hear Him, to continually recognize the direction God wanted him to go?

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Loving others is central to the Christian life regardless of our day-by-day situation. Is loving others a calling? What might that look like? Our callings should not become a reason to boast. How do we make sure that even when our calling is received/accepted we love others as Christ loved us?

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The called life is one that walks in the light; it comprehends the new life God gives us and acts accordingly, seeking to love and serve God while loving and serving our neighbors. As Paul says, it’s “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might” (1:18-19).

Being called by God is both a calling *to* something (God, others) and a calling *away from* something (self, world). It’s God gracing our lives with the opportunity to serve Him as a member of the body of Christ. It’s also realizing He has already ordained great things for us to do in the service of that body. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10).



Heavenly Father, that You would call us to serve You is a profound mystery. Nevertheless, we accept Your gracious calling and, empowered by the example of Jesus and the indwelling of Your Holy Spirit, seek to live lives worthy of Your Son, our Lord and Savior. In His Name we pray. Amen.

## Part Two - Called to Faith

In Session 2 of *Nurturing Your Faith: Called*, we'll again be drawing from the book of Ephesians as we look at how God's call to faith is a call to transformation (see Ephesians 2:1-7). Our part in the body of Christ is very much an active one (or should be). Jesus' desire is for us to be sanctified in the truth—united with Him and the Father (see John 17:17-21). Through us, quite simply, God works. From Abraham's call out of Ur of the Chaldeans (see Genesis 11-12) to Christ's epiphany to Paul on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-19), God is in the business of calling us from our lives (pastoral nomad, Christian persecutor, your life here) to come and follow Him.

 Watch video introduction with Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler, Speaker of The Lutheran Hour, at [lhm.org/studies](http://lhm.org/studies).

### RECOGNIZING OUR CALL

While the idea of being *called by God* to a new and vibrant life may seem alien in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, God's been doing it from the beginning. He's in the business of transformation—a complete renovation of the human heart, done from within and evident without. There is no one not in need of this divine touch of forgiveness. No one is excused from the sin in their life. “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22b-24), and again, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

As we can see here, God's calling isn't merely an invitation to a better life. It's His declaration to us that the ransom has been paid: the doors have been flung open; the chains have been loosed; we are free to go. No longer captive, because of Jesus we are God's people now—redeemed and set apart. “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). This is truly good news, but where will we go? What will we do with this great salvation that has been given to us? *What is the calling for our life?*

Saved by grace (see Eph. 2:8-9), we are called to grow up into Him who is the head (see Eph. 4:15). How do we live so that Jesus is given this place of priority in our lives?

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How do you think God shapes us to our calling? How does He hone us as members of the body of Christ to be useful to others?

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A Christian is in the world but not of it. How do we grasp our calling, live a transformed life, and yet not come off as weird and unapproachable to our non-Christian friends and acquaintances?

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## LIVES THAT BLESS

Consider Abraham's response to God's call. Pulling up stakes from his ancestral homeland in southern Mesopotamia at age 75, he shows us we're never too old to listen—and *respond*—to God's calling. "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing'" (Genesis 12:1-2). Abraham's obedient faith marks him as righteous; his called life showed him as a man of vigor, courage, weakness, commitment, foibles, and sacrifice—just the kind of person God can use to be a blessing to others.

Considering that most Christians are not apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, or teachers (see Eph. 4:11), our calling must be more than what we do. Therefore, we focus on who we are to be as His called sons and daughters—people like Jesus: servant-like, loving, and obedient unto death (see Philippians 2:5-11). This is our calling as Christians—that we may gain Christ, clothed with a righteousness from God through faith, that we "may know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Eph. 3:9-11). As God's children, we are gifted with the knowledge—and the desire to follow—that God alone can give. As Paul writes, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Eph. 5:1-2).

"So that you will be a blessing" to others was God's pronouncement to Abraham. As a Christian, do you consider yourself a blessing to others—your spouse, kids, neighbors, coworkers? How so?

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Abraham was no “spring chicken” when God called him, but as a result of following His lead, all the nations of the earth have been blessed. What does this say about your age, station in life, and what God might do through you?

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God calls us to such noble lives, doesn't He? To “be imitators of Christ” is an honor unworthy of us and far beyond our feeble means to achieve. How do you find the strength and willingness to do this?

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## STAYING ZEROED IN

While our fervent goal may be to live the called life with all the zeal and passion we can muster, there will be times when we get derailed and thrown off course. Paul knew only too well how believers get sidetracked and stuck. His and other New Testament letters are full of admonitions to steadfastness in faith and constancy of purpose (see 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Peter 3:14-18; Philippians 1:27). He also knew how little it takes to divert our attention from God back to the world. “You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:7-9).

And how little that leaven might be! While today's derailing persuasion is probably not circumcision or the seductive appeal of Greek mystery religions, it's just as potent. This is where a constant return to God's Word is essential. Here, Joshua's charge to Israel's leaders rings out truer than ever for us today. He recounted the Lord's works on Israel's behalf, the victories and protection He granted, the promises He made. As the nation was going forward, soon without him, Joshua urged Israel to stay intent on God's Word (“the Book of the Law of Moses”) and to shun the enticements and temptations all around them (mixing with other nations, worshipping their gods) and to “cling to the Lord your God just as you have done to this day” (see Joshua 23:1-13).

In a similar vein, note Paul's words of encouragement to Timothy in his second letter. He reminds his “beloved child” in the faith of “the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling.” We are set apart by God for kingdom service. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth.” In other words, dig deep; know your Bible; memorize Scripture; you'll need it for your new life in Christ. And then Paul says to Timothy, but he could be speaking to us, “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace.” No matter what your calling, these remain essential to any believer. (Read 2 Timothy 1-4.)



Life is choices, using time wisely and, sometimes, frittering it away. How do you waste time? How can our dabbling and appetite for the next trending thing interfere with and/or neutralize our faith walk? What can we do to make the most of the hours we have (see Eph. 5:15-17)?

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What do you do when the principles of your faith are in conflict with the world? Do you pause to negotiate a workable/comfortable outcome? Do you have any special tactics that work well?

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Honoring God's calling begins with nothing less than following Jesus— *closely*. Can you give three or four gems that Paul wrote Timothy that you'd like to commit to memory as you follow Jesus?

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As you read above in 2 Timothy, God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:4b). Through His Holy Spirit, He gives us courage and steadies us when the world looms large and threatens to wreck our faith. He understands our faults and failings and urges us to “walk by the Spirit,” mindful of the flesh and its works, even as we strive to follow His Son's example (see Galatians 5:16-26).

Thankfully, once we are called to faith, God does not leave us to our own devices; instead, He supplies all our needs “according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19b). For the called saint, Paul reminds us that there is nothing that can destroy the one outfitted with the whole armor of God (see Eph. 6:10-20).



Heavenly Father, without You we are adrift in this world. You have called us and made us Your own. By Your Holy Spirit, strengthen our faith in Your Son and our love for one another. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

## Part Three - Called to Others

In Sessions 1 and 2 of *Nurturing Your Faith: Called*, we explored how God places His call on our lives. It is He alone who saves, He alone who delivers us and makes a way for us through life's wilderness (see Isaiah 43:11-21). And it is God Himself who grants us the gift of faith, who calls us from the world and makes us His own—through His Son Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:3b). As with all of God's gifts, however, they await our use—in the service of others. As we continue studying Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the apostle applauds this church's outward expression of faith: "For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and *your love toward all the saints*, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15-16).

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 ONE FOR ALL

When you realize our call to faith in Christ leads to a life of love and service, things can get a bit overwhelming. Realizing that it's also about *sharing* the Gospel can be downright terrifying. After all, chances are we haven't received a divine mandate like what Paul heard from God via Ananias: "But the Lord said to him (Ananias), 'Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My Name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My Name'" (Acts 9:16). On the other hand, the truth is we too *have been* issued such a calling from God. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

The faithful at Ephesus knew their faith didn't just mystically happen to them, with no reason as to its cause. In fact, at one time they were far from God—"separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12b). So what changed for them? What changed was somebody heeded God's call. Somebody acted upon the divine instruction to live out their faith and share it with others. Somebody brought them the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus. Now—where formerly there was division and discord among themselves and before God—there was peace and a spirit of fellowship. Jesus "has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14b).

When having a spiritual conversation with someone, how do you feel (for the most part) during the discussion? Are there topics where you lock up? Why do you think this is?

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Why is it important to articulate our faith to others? Does doing so bring benefits to the believer? What might they be?

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Are there Christians you know who keep the sharing-Jesus-with-others thing front and center, as they go about their day-to-day lives? From your experience, what does that look like?

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## SPEAKING THE TRUTH

The Christians at Ephesus had some peculiar challenges. Like many of the cities Paul visited during his missionary journeys in Asia Minor, Ephesus was a cosmopolitan mix of backgrounds and nationalities. Full of pagan practice and influence, Ephesians were weaned on the milk of rite and ritual for a host of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. (The Temple of Artemis was there, larger than the Parthenon in Athens, and one of the ancient world's "Seven Wonders"). In the midst of this, the teachings of a lowly Jewish Messiah with little to no "curb appeal" (see Isaiah 53) must have rung awkwardly in the ears of such sophisticates. But where the light of Christ shines, darkness is scattered, people are changed, and new lives begin (see John 8:12).

Paul knew the Ephesians' story, what they were up against, and how God had worked among them. He commended their love toward the saints, but there were others who needed to hear the Good News, too. Even as the Ephesians had been "strangers and aliens" to the household of God, now they were "fellow citizens," with full access to the Father through His Spirit (see Eph. 2:18-19).

With this newfound citizenship came responsibilities. As “fellow heirs” by God’s grace, these Gentiles were to speak the truth “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:6a, 10). The time to declare God’s love to the world had come.

Do you have a time of it when trying to talk to others about God? List some brothers or sisters in the faith who can help empower your conversation. Challenge yourself this month to ask one for help.

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“They will know we are Christians by our love,” as the song goes. How important is our spoken outreach in that identification?

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As parents and grandparents, how can we train younger generations to be better conversationalists about Jesus and their faith?

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 FINDING OUR VOICE

Paul knew well that believers had to guard their hearts against the world and its many entanglements. His hope for the Ephesian church and others in Asia Minor was to attain unity through a mature faith and a growing knowledge of God’s Son. To do this was a safeguard against wayward doctrines and the lure of devious and misleading arguments. Competition for hearts and minds was stiff at Ephesus and elsewhere in the region (see Colossians 2:8). Paul’s hope for Ephesian believers was nothing less than a complete break with their former lives, so they may speak the truth in love, as they grow up into Christ so that “each part is working properly,” building itself up in love (see Eph. 4:13-16). Only then will they have something to say to those in darkness around them.

Our age is not much different, is it? The marketplace of drivel and confusion is always open, and we too must be on guard. As Paul told Timothy, we should do our best to present ourselves “to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). This takes time and application. As we navigate life’s public and social spaces, either face-to-face or online, we want a faith that’s authentic, solid in understanding, and “created”—as Paul said—“after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24b). While the temptation might be to have a *Jesus-and-what-can-I-bring-to-the-table* faith persona, this will only end badly. Rather than buck against worshiping marble idols, today we elevate *self* to those same pedestals. Like the Ephesians, as we’re called to others, as we represent Jesus in the world, may our faith “not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5b).

Do potential conversations about God or faith ever spontaneously occur in your life? If/when they do, do you seek to expand the dialogue or steer clear of them altogether? Why?

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In what areas of your life can you be more receptive to intentionally engaging others in conversations about God and faith?

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How do you think you are received by others as a Christian? Consider how you represent Christ, is there anything you can do to make yourself more appealing to others (see 2 Corinthians 2:14-16a)?

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The spiritual wellbeing of the Ephesian church necessitated that it paid close attention to its new life in Christ. With this city's visible impress of gods, goddesses, temples, and monuments appearing at every turn, the pull of the familiar was a real issue for Ephesian Christians. To combat this, the church needed to shun these corrupt trappings and hold tight to Christ. As Paul said when referring to their idolatrous past, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:20-24).

As Christians we're called to others in many different ways. Sometimes we bring relief through physical labor or running an errand. At other times, our quiet companionship with one who is ill or dying might be our greatest contribution. In all these things, our aim is to serve others "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3).



Heavenly Father, as we speak about Jesus and the love of God, may the Holy Spirit bless our words and direct our conversations. May love rule our hearts so that our desire is for Your Son to be lifted up everywhere. As ambassadors for Christ in this world, let it ever be more of Jesus and less of us. In His Name we pray. Amen.

## Part Four - Called to Share

So far in *Nurturing Your Faith: Called*, we have considered the nature of God’s call and its impact on our day-to-day lives as believers. God calls us to Himself (session 1); redeems and sanctifies us in His call to faith (session 2); calls us for service to others (session 3); and as we shall see in this session, calls us to share. With the letter to the Ephesians to guide us, Paul plainly states our role as Christ-followers: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). For Paul, part of being God’s “workmanship” meant telling His story. “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, *to testify to the Gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24).



Watch video introduction with Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler, Speaker of **The Lutheran Hour**, at [lhm.org/studies](http://lhm.org/studies).



### EVERYONE'S MISSION

Ephesians—one of Paul’s “captivity letters” written likely while he was imprisoned in Rome (along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon)—reveals again Paul’s great heart for proclamation. He knew that while God calls us out of the world, He, in effect, sends us right back into it—armed with the Good News of Jesus to share it boldly no matter what our circumstances, even imprisonment (see Ephesians 3:1; 6:19-20). When we think of Paul and his heated debates; his hair-raising, near-death misses; his out-and-out beatings; and the like, we may be tempted to view outreach as “the other guy’s” calling. But through it all, God empowers. He takes our deepseated fears and cold sweats and comforts us; He knows our insecurities; He’s seen every failure, and He gives us something in their place: newness of life (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

While Paul understood his new and right standing before God, he knew talking about Jesus wouldn’t be easy. He knew the opposition—he’d been there. At one time, he loathed the same message and Messiah he now declared (see Acts 9:1-2), working feverishly to stomp out the first glowing embers of Christianity. But Paul’s calling—the same one you and I hear today—changed him from the inside out. How else does a person go from persecutor to persecuted unless the truth of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection scrubs clean the dark corners in his or her heart? Paul was saved—by the grace of God (see Romans 3:21-26), and he was going to take every breath he had to breathe out that message of love and forgiveness to others.

Have you seen God work a radical change in your life? If you became a Christian as an adult, how comfortable are you in sharing this with those who knew you before you received Christ? Is it easier to talk to strangers about Jesus?

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How does Paul's ministry while in prison (see Philippians 1:12-14) show God at work, drawing people to Himself, regardless of their circumstances?

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How important is it to be receptive to opportunities to share the Gospel? Do you look for chances to have spiritual conversations? Do you recognize them when they occur?

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## READING THE LANDSCAPE

Paul seems like a guy who could spot an outreach opportunity a mile away—and not miss the one at his elbow either. Whether he was in a synagogue (see Acts 9:20-22) or on a sinking ship (see Acts 27), he was quick to testify to his faith and the reality of God's salvation to all through Jesus (see Acts 17:22-31). This is a special quality: a top-of-mind awareness that any and all encounters are potential faith-sharing occasions. So how does one become that sensitive to circumstances? Paul may have summed it up best when he said: "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.* And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).



Classic Paul here: for all the education and eloquence he possessed, his demeanor was one of humility, vulnerability, weakness. He did not want the person of Paul to be what the Corinthians remembered; rather, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." With that as his sole message, their faith would rest solidly on God's power to redeem and renew. Likewise, he wrote to the churches in Asia Minor: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2).

Have you ever found yourself talking about God and faith with someone in a way that surprised you? That surprised them?

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What are some personal pitfalls you have to be wary of when sharing your faith? Have you addressed those things? Do you pray about them? Have others given you feedback in this regard?

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How can God's Word help us address personal issues (i.e. shyness, reticence, awkwardness, sounding "preachy," etc.) before we're in a spiritual conversation? Are there things we can do to ready ourselves to share the Gospel as we begin our day?

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Is there a person(s) in your life with whom you'd like to have a spiritual conversation? Maybe it's a son or daughter whose life is unstable, and they're resistant to the things of God. It might be a close friend with whom you've shared many things, but never *those kinds* of things. It could even be a spouse who for all his or her Christian-like qualities is still hazy on Jesus' role in salvation (see John 3:16), despite years of church involvement together. These are difficult situations because they're close to home, and that makes us doubly befuddled. You may feel you've already missed the chance to say something and that doing so now would be clumsy and presumptuous. You may fear causing a rift or a break in the status quo of your relationship if you say something. We all have our reasons for not sharing our faith.

One thing's for certain though, no matter how well prepared we are, or how much we end up muddling through the conversation, it's the Holy Spirit who calls the person to faith. There's great relief in that, too. Naturally, we want to be prepared for spiritual conversations (see 2 Timothy 2:15), as the Lord surely has more to work with when we've "done our homework," but as the song says, "T'was grace that brought us safe thus far, And grace will lead us home." God does it all. It's His grace at work, as we tell others about Jesus, as we reach out to them in love and concern. Our aim is to be more like Jesus in all we do. Our role, as Paul says, is to "be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Who do you know is in need of God's love and forgiveness right now? Would you like to talk to them? Do you feel like you can without being stifled, rejected, or having them view you as non-credible?

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Do you read/watch/listen to spiritual resources that are developed specifically to help people share Jesus more effectively? What are your favorites?

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If you received Christ through someone's personal witness, can you summarize your coming to faith in words? Would it be good to get down on paper the kind of conversations you had, the questions you asked, the way they were handled, what caused you to keep listening, and the overall character of your interactions with that person(s)?

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Being called to share Jesus with others is an awesome responsibility. Reading God's Word, spending time in prayer, and taking advantage of outreach resources all help us become more effective witnesses. To this end, Lutheran Hour Ministries has a growing catalog of Christ-centered outreach tools that you can use to empower your spiritual conversations and keep them more Jesus-focused. Texts like *The Reluctant Witness: Discovering the Delight of Spiritual Conversations* and *How to Talk About Your Faith: An Introduction to the Spiritual Conversation Curve* are lively reads that show how sharing Jesus is something we can all do—and do well. Similarly, **LHM Learn's** online courses (five faith-strengthening categories, many topics, all FREE!) can empower your outreach to others with greater knowledge and confidence.

In closing, we do well to remember Paul's words, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21).



Heavenly Father, stir within us a heartfelt desire to be Christ-like for others, speaking to them of Jesus, loving them as You love us. Amen.






## LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES

[www.lhm.org](http://www.lhm.org)

Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) is a Christian outreach ministry supporting churches worldwide in its mission of ***Bringing Christ to the Nations—and the Nations to the Church.***

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